



The Teaching of the Buddha

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When the Buddha preached his first sermon to the five monks at Benares the topics he selected were the following. First comes an introduction about avoiding extremes of either self-indulgence or self-mortification. This was specially appropriate to his hearers who were ascetics and disposed to over-rate the value of austerities. Next he defines the middle way or eightfold path. Then he enunciates the four truths of the nature of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the method of bringing about that cessation. This method is no other than the eightfold path. Then his hearers understood that whatever has a beginning must have an end. This knowledge is described as the pure and spotless Eye of Truth. The Buddha then formally admitted them as the first members of the Sangha. He then explained to them that there is no such thing as self. We are not told that they received any further instruction before they were sent forth to be teachers and missionaries: they were, it would seem, sufficiently equipped. When the Buddha instructs his sixth convert, Yasa, the introduction is slightly different, doubtless because he was a layman. It treats of "almsgiving, of moral duties, of heaven, of the evil, vanity and sinfulness of desires, of the blessings which come from abandoning desires." Then when his catechumen's mind was prepared, he preached to him "the chief doctrine of the Buddhas, namely suffering, its cause, its cessation and the Path." And when Yasa understood this he obtained the Eye of Truth.

It is clear, therefore, that the Buddha regarded practice as the foundation of his system. He wished to create a temper and a habit of life. Mere acquiescence in dogma, such as a Christian creed, is not sufficient as a basis of religion and test of membership. It is only in the second stage that he enunciates the four great theorems of his system (of which one, the Path, is a matter of practice rather than doctrine) and only later still that he expounds conceptions which are logically fundamental, such as his view of personality. "Just as the great ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt, so has this doctrine and discipline only one taste, the taste of emancipation." This practical aim has affected the form given to much of the Buddha's teaching, for instance the theory of the Skandhas and the chain of causation. When examined at leisure by a student of to-day, the dogmas seem formulated with imperfect logic and the results trite and obvious. But such doctrines as that evil must have a cause which can be discovered and removed by natural methods: that a bad unhappy mind can be turned into a good, happy mind by suppressing evil thoughts and cultivating good thoughts, are not commonplaces even now, if they receive a practical application, and in 500 B.C. they were not commonplaces in any sense.

And yet no one can read Buddhist books or associate with Buddhist monks without feeling that the intellectual element is preponderant, not the emotional. The ultimate cause of suffering is ignorance. The Buddha has won the truth by understanding the universe. Conversion is usually described by some such phrase as acquiring the Eye of Truth, rather than by words expressing belief or devotion. The major part of the ideal life, set forth in a recurring passage of the *Dîgha Nikâya*, consists in the creation of intellectual states, and though the Buddha disavowed all speculative philosophy his discourses are full, if not of metaphysics, at least of psychology. And this knowledge is essential. It is not sufficient to affirm one's belief in it; it

must be assimilated and taken into the life of every true Buddhist. All cannot do this: most of the unconverted are blinded by lust and passion, but some are incapacitated by want of mental power. They must practise virtue and in a happier birth their minds will be enlarged.

The reader who has perused the previous chapters will have some idea of the tone and subject matter of the Buddha's preaching. We will now examine his doctrine as a system and will begin with the theory of existence, premising that it disclaims all idea of doing more than analyze our experience. With speculations or assertions as to the origin, significance and purpose of the Universe, the Buddha has nothing to do. Such questions do not affect his scheme of salvation. What views—if any—he may have held or implied about them we shall gather as we go on. But it is dangerous to formulate what he did not formulate himself, and not always easy to understand what he did formulate. For his words, though often plain and striking, are, like the utterances of other great teachers, apt to provoke discordant explanations. They meet our thoughts half way, but no interpretation exhausts their meaning. When we read into them the ideas of modern philosophy and combine them into a system logical and plausible after the standard of this age, we often feel that the result is an anachronism: but if we treat them as ancient simple discourses by one who wished to make men live an austere and moral life, we still find that there are uncomfortably profound sayings which will not harmonize with this theory.

The Buddha's aversion to speculation did not prevent him from insisting on the importance of a correct knowledge of our mental constitution, the chain of causation and other abstruse matters; nor does it really take the form of neglecting metaphysics: rather of defining them in a manner so authoritative as to imply a reserve of unimparted knowledge. Again and again questions about the fundamental mysteries of existence are put to him and he will not give an answer. It would not conduce to knowledge, peace, or freedom from passion, we are told, and, therefore, the Lord has not declared it. *Therefore*: not, it would seem, because he did not know, but because the discussion was not profitable. And the modern investigator, who is not so submissive as the Buddha's disciples, asks why not? Can it be that the teacher knew of things transcendental not to be formulated in words? Once he compared the truths he had taught his disciples to a bunch of leaves which he held in his hand and the other truths which he knew but had not taught to the leaves of the whole forest in which they were walking. And the story of the blind men and the elephant seems to hint that Buddhas, those rare beings who are not blind, can see the constitution of the universe. May we then in chance phrases get a glimpse of ideas which he would not develop? It may be so, but the quest is temerarious. "What I have revealed hold as revealed, and what I have not revealed, hold as not revealed." The gracious but authoritative figure of the Master gives no further reply when we endeavour to restate his teaching in some completer form which admits of comparison with the ancient and modern philosophies of Europe.

The best introduction to his theory of existence is perhaps the instruction given to the five monks after his first sermon. The body is not the self, he says, for if it were, it would not be subject to disease and we should be able to say, let my body be or not be such and such. As the denial of the existence of the self or ego (*Attâ* in Pali, *Âtman* in Sanskrit) is one of the fundamental and original tenets of Gotama, we must remember that this self whose existence is denied is something not subject to decay, and possessing perfect free will with power to exercise it. The Brahmanic *Âtman* is such a self but it is found nowhere in the world of our experience. For the body or form is not the self, neither is sensation or feeling (*vedanâ*) for they are not free and eternal. Neither is perception (*saññâ*) the self. Neither, the Buddha goes on to say, are the *Sankhâras* the self, and for the same reason.

Here we find ourselves sailing on the high seas of dogmatic terminology and must investigate the meaning of this important and untranslatable word. It is equivalent to the Sanskrit *samskâra*, which is akin to the word Sanskrit itself, and means compounding, making anything artificial and elaborate. It may be literally translated as synthesis or confection, and is often used in the general sense of phenomena since all phenomena are compound. Occasionally we hear of three *Sankhâras*, body or deed, word and thought. But in later literature the *Sankhâras* become

a category with fifty-two divisions and these are mostly mental or at least subjective states. The list opens with contact (*phasso*) and then follow sensation, perception, thought, reflection, memory and a series of dispositions or states such as attention, effort, joy, torpor, stupidity, fear, doubt, lightness of body or mind, pity, envy, worry, pride. As European thought does not class all these items under one heading or, in other words, has no idea equivalent to *Sankhâra*, it is not surprising that no adequate rendering has been found, especially as Buddhism regards everything as mere becoming, not fixed existence, and hence does not distinguish sharply between a process and a result—between the act of preparing and a preparation. Conformations, confections, syntheses, co-efficients, tendencies, potentialities have all been used as equivalents but I propose to use the Pali word as a rule. In some passages the word *phenomena* is an adequate literary equivalent, if it is remembered that *phenomena* are not thought of apart from a perceiving subject: in others some word like predispositions or tendencies is a more luminous rendering, because the *Sankhâras* are the potentialities for good and evil action existing in the mind as a result of Karma.

The Buddha has now enumerated four categories which are not the self. The fifth and last is *Viññâna*, frequently rendered by consciousness. But this word is unsuitable in so far as it suggests in English some unified and continuous mental state. *Viññâna* sometimes corresponds to thought and sometimes is hardly distinguished from perception, for it means awareness of what is pleasant or painful, sweet or sour and so on. But the Pitakas continually insist that it is not a unity and that its varieties come into being only when they receive proper nourishment or, as we should say, an adequate stimulus. Thus visual consciousness depends on the sight and on visible objects, auditory consciousness on the hearing and on sounds. *Viññâna* is divided into eighty-nine classes according as it is good, bad or indifferent, but none of these classes, nor all of them together, can be called the self.

These five groups—body, feeling, perception, the *sankhâras*, thought—are generally known as the *Skandhas* signifying in Sanskrit collections or aggregates. The classification adopted is not completely logical, for feeling and perception are both included in the *Sankhâras* and also counted separately. But the object of the Buddha was not so much to analyze the physical and mental constitution of a human being as to show that this constitution contains no element which can be justly called self or soul. For this reason all possible states of mind are catalogued, sometimes under more than one head. They are none of them the self and no self, ego, or soul in the sense defined above is discernible, only aggregates of states and properties which come together and fall apart again. When we investigate ourselves we find nothing but psychical states: we do not find a psyche. The mind is even less permanent than the body, for the body may last a hundred years or so “but that which is called mind, thought or consciousness, day and night keeps perishing as one thing and springing up as another.” So in the *Samyutta-Nikâya*, Mara the Tempter asks the nun *Vajirâ* by whom this being, that is the human body, is made. Her answer is “Here is a mere heap of *sankhâras*: there is no ‘being.’ As when various parts are united, the word ‘chariot’ is used (to describe the whole), so when the *skandhas* are present, the word ‘being’ is commonly used. But it is suffering only that comes into existence and passes away.” And *Buddhaghosa* says:

“Misery only doth exist, none miserable;
No doer is there, naught but the deed is found;
Nirvana is, but not the man that seeks it;
The path exists but not the traveller on it.”

Thus the Buddha and his disciples rejected such ideas as soul, being and personality. But their language does not always conform to this ideal of negative precision, for the vocabulary of Pali (and still more of English) is inadequate for the task of discussing what form conduct and belief should take unless such words are used. Also the *Attâ* (*Âtman*), which the Buddha denies, means more than is implied by our words self and personality. The word commonly used to signify an individual is *puggalo*. Thus in one sutta the Buddha preaches of the burden, the bearer

of the burden, taking it up and laying it down. The burden is the five skandhas and the bearer is the individual or puggalo. This, if pressed, implies that there is a personality apart from the skandhas which has to bear them. But probably it should not be pressed and we should regard the utterance as merely a popular sermon using language which is, strictly speaking, metaphorical.

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The doctrine of Anattâ—the doctrine that there is no such thing as a soul or self—is justly emphasized as a most important part of the Buddha’s teaching and Buddhist ethics might be summarized as the selfless life. Yet there is a danger that Europeans may exaggerate and misunderstand the doctrine by taking it as equivalent to a denial of the soul’s immortality or of free will or to an affirmation that mind is a function of the body. The universality of the proposition really diminishes its apparent violence and nihilism. To say that some beings have a soul and others have not is a formidable proposition, but to say that absolutely no existing person or thing contains anything which can be called a self or soul is less revolutionary than it sounds. It clearly does not deny that men exist for decades and mountains for millenniums: neither does it deny that before birth or after death there may be other existences similar to human life. It merely states that in all the world, organic and inorganic, there is nothing which is simple, self-existent, self-determined, and permanent: everything is compound, relative and transitory. The obvious fact that infancy, youth and age form a series is not denied: the series may be called a personality and death need not end it. The error to be avoided is the doctrine of the Brahmins that through this series there runs a changeless self, which assumes new phases like one who puts on new garments.

The co-ordination and apparent unity observable in our mental constitution is due to *mano* which is commonly translated mind but is really for Buddhism, as for the Upanishads, a *sensus communis*. Whereas the five senses have different spheres or fields which are independent and do not overlap, *mano* has a share in all these spheres. It receives and cognizes all sense impressions.

The philosophy of early Buddhism deals with psychology rather than with metaphysics. It holds it profitable to analyze and discuss man’s mental constitution, because such knowledge leads to the destruction of false ideals and the pursuit of peace and insight. Enquiry into the origin and nature of the external world is not equally profitable: in fact it is a vain intellectual pastime. Still in treating of such matters as sensation, perception and consciousness, it is impossible to ignore the question of external objects or to avoid propounding, at least by implication, some theory about them. In this connection we often come upon the important word Dhamma (Sanskrit, Dharma). It means a law, and more especially the law of the Buddha, or, in a wider sense, justice, righteousness or religion. But outside the moral and religious sphere it is commonly used in the plural as equivalent to phenomena, considered as involving states of consciousness. The Dhamma-saṅgaṇi divides phenomena into those which exist for the subject and those which exist for other individuals and ignores the possibility of things existing apart from a knowing subject. This hints at idealism and other statements seem more precise. Thus the Saṃyutta-Nikāya declares: “Verily, within this mortal body, some six feet high, but conscious and endowed with mind, is the world, and its origin, and its passing away.” And similarly the problem is posed, “Where do the four elements pass away and leave no trace behind.” Neither gods nor men can answer it, and when it is referred to the Buddha, his decision is that the question is wrongly put and therefore admits of no solution.

“Instead of asking where the four elements pass away without trace, you should have asked:

Where do earth, water, fire and wind,
And long and short and fine and coarse,
Pure and impure no footing find?
Where is it that both name and form
Die out and leave no trace behind?”

To that the answer is: In the mind of the Saint.

Yet it is certain that such passages should not be interpreted as equivalent to the later Yogâcâra doctrine that only thought really exists or to any form of the doctrine that the world is Mâyâ or illusion. The Pitakas leave no doubt on this point, for they elaborate with clearness and consistency the theory that sensation and consciousness depend on contact, that is contact between sense organs and sense objects. “Man is conceived as a compound of instruments, receptive and reacting” and the Samyutta-Nikâya puts into the Buddha’s mouth the following dogmatic statement. “Consciousness arises because of duality. What is that duality? Visual consciousness arises because of sight and because of visible objects. Sight is transitory and mutable: it is its very nature to change. Visible objects are the same. So this duality is both in movement and transitory.”

The question of the reality of the external world did not present itself to the early Buddhists. Had it been posed we may surmise that the Buddha would have replied, as in similar cases, that the question was not properly put. He would not, we may imagine, have admitted that the human mind has the creative power which idealism postulates, for such power seems to imply the existence of something like a self or âtman. But still though the Pitakas emphasize the empirical duality of sense-organs and sense-objects, they also supply a basis for the doctrines of Nâgârjuna and Asanga, which like much late Buddhist metaphysics insist on using logic in regions where the master would not use it. When it is said that the genesis of the world and its passing away are within this mortal frame, the meaning probably is that the world as we experience it with its pains and pleasures depends on the senses and that with the modification or cessation of the senses it is changed or comes to an end. In other words (for this doctrine like most of the Buddha’s doctrines is at bottom ethical rather than metaphysical) the saint can make or unmake his own world and triumph over pain. But the theory of sensation may be treated not ethically but metaphysically. Sensation implies a duality and on the one side the Buddha’s teaching argues that there is no permanent sentient self but merely different kinds of consciousness arising in response to different stimuli. It is admitted too that visible objects are changing and transitory like sight itself and thus there is no reason to regard the external world, which is one half of the duality, as more permanent, self-existent and continuous than the other half. When we apply to it the destructive analysis which the Buddha applied only to mental states, we easily arrive at the nihilism or idealism of the later Buddhists. Of this I will treat later. For the present we have only to note that early Buddhism holds that sensation depends on contact, that is on a duality. It does not investigate the external part of this duality and it is clear that such investigation leads to the very speculations which the Buddha declared to be unprofitable, such as arguments about the eternity and infinity of the universe.

The doctrine of Anattâ is counterbalanced by the doctrine of causation. Without this latter the Buddha might seem to teach that life is a chaos of shadows. But on the contrary he teaches the universality of law, in this life and in all lives. For Hindus of most schools of thought, metempsychosis means the doctrine that the immortal soul passes from one bodily tenement to another, and is reborn again and again: karma is the law which determines the occurrence and the character of these births. In Buddhism, though the Pitakas speak continually of rebirth, metempsychosis is an incorrect expression since there is no soul to transmigrate and there is strictly speaking nothing but karma. This word, signifying literally action or act, is the name of the force which finds expression in the fact that every event is the result of causes and also is itself a cause which produces effects; further in the fact (for Indians regard it as one) that when a life, whether of a god, man or lower creature, comes to an end, the sum of its actions (which is in many connections equivalent to personal character) takes effect as a whole and determines the character of another aggregation of skandhas—in popular language, another being—representing the net result of the life which has come to an end. Karma is also used in the more concrete sense of the merit or demerit acquired by various acts. Thus we hear of karma which manifests itself in this life, and of karma which only manifests itself in another. No explanation whatever is given of the origin of karma, of its reason, method or aims and it would not be consistent with the principles of the Buddha to give such an explanation. Indeed,

though it is justifiable to speak of karma as a force which calls into being the world as we know it, such a phrase goes beyond the habitual language of early Buddhism which merely states that everything has a cause and that every one's nature and circumstances are the result of previous actions in this or other existences. Karma is not so much invoked as a metaphysical explanation of the universe as accorded the consideration which it merits as an ultimate moral fact.

It has often been pointed out that the Buddha did not originate or even first popularize the ideas of reincarnation and karma: they are Indian, not specifically Buddhist. In fact, of all Indian systems of thought, Buddhism is the one which has the greatest difficulty in expressing these ideas in intelligible and consistent language, because it denies the existence of the ego. Some writers have gone so far as to suggest that the whole doctrine formed no part of the Buddha's original teaching and was an accretion, or at most a concession of the master to the beliefs of his time. But I cannot think this view is correct. The idea is woven into the texture of the Buddha's discourses. When in words which have as strong a claim as any in the Pitakas to be regarded as old and genuine he describes the stages by which he acquired enlightenment and promises the same experiences to those who observe his discipline, he says that he first followed the thread of his own previous existences through past æons, plumbing the unfathomed depths of time: next, the whole of existence was spread out before him, like a view-seen from above, and he saw beings passing away from one body and taking shape in another, according to their deeds. Only when he understood both the perpetual transformation of the universe and also the line and sequence in which that transformation occurs, only then did he see the four truths as they really are.

It is unfortunate for us that the doctrine of reincarnation met with almost universal assent in India. If some one were to found a new Christian sect, he would probably not be asked to prove the immortality of the soul: it is assumed as part of the common religious belief. Similarly, no one asked the Buddha to prove the doctrine of rebirth. If we permit our fancy to picture an interview between him and someone holding the ordinary ideas of an educated European about the soul, we may imagine that he would have some difficulty in understanding what is the alternative to rebirth. His interlocutor might reply that there are two types of theory among Europeans. Some think that the soul comes into existence with the body at birth but continues to exist everlasting and immortal after the death of the body. Others, commonly called materialists, while agreeing that the soul comes into existence with the birth of the body, hold that it ceases to exist with the death of the body. To the first theory the Buddha would probably have replied that there is one law without exception, namely that whatever has a beginning has also an end. The whole universe offers no analogy or parallel to the soul which has a beginning but no end, and not the smallest logical need is shown for believing a doctrine so contrary to the nature of things. And as for materialism he would probably say that it is a statement of the processes of the world as perceived but no explanation of the mental or even of the physical world. The materialists forget that objects as known cannot be isolated from the knowing subject. Sensation implies contact and duality but it is no real explanation to say that mental phenomena are caused by physical phenomena. The Buddha reckoned among vain speculations not only such problems as the eternity and infinity of the world but also the question, Is the principle of life (Jīva) identical with the body or not identical. That question, he said, is not properly put, which is tantamount to condemning as inadequate all theories which derive life and thought from purely material antecedents. Other ideas of modern Europe, such as that the body is an instrument on which the soul works, or the expression of the soul, seem to imply, or at least to be compatible with, the pre-existence of the soul.

It is probable too that the Buddha would have said, and a modern Buddhist would certainly say, that the fact of rebirth can easily be proved by testimony and experience, because those who will make the effort can recall their previous births. For his hearers the difficulty must have been not to explain why they believed in rebirth but to harmonize the belief with the rest of the master's system, for what is reborn and how? We detect a tendency to say that it is *Viññāṇa*, or consciousness, and the expression *paṭisandhiviññāṇam* or rebirth-consciousness occurs. The question is treated in an important dialogue in the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, where a monk called *Sāti*

maintains that, according to the Buddha's teaching, consciousness transmigrates unchanged. The Buddha summoned Sāti and rebuked his error in language of unusual severity, for it was evidently capital and fatal if persisted in. The Buddha does not state what transmigrates, as the European reader would wish him to do, and would no doubt have replied to that question that it is improperly framed and does not admit of an answer.

His argument is directed not so much against the idea that consciousness in one existence can have some connection with consciousness in the next, as against the idea that this consciousness is a unity and permanent. He maintains that it is a complex process due to many causes, each producing its own effect. Yet the Pitakas seem to admit that the processes which constitute consciousness in one life, can also produce their effect in another life, for the character of future lives may be determined by the wishes which we form in this life. Existence is really a succession of states of consciousness following one another irrespective of bodies. If *ABC* and *abc* are two successive lives, *ABC* is not more of a reality or unity than *BCa*. No personality passes over at death from *ABC* to *abc* but then *ABC* is itself not a unity: it is merely a continuous process of change.

The discourse seems to say that *taṇhā*, the thirst for life, is the connecting link between different births, but it does not use this expression. In one part of his address the Buddha exhorts his disciples not to enquire what they were or what they will be or what is the nature of their present existence, but rather to master and think out for themselves the universal law of causation, that every state has a cause for coming into being and a cause for passing away. No doubt his main object is as usual practical, to incite to self-control rather than to speculation. But may he not also have been under the influence of the idea that time is merely a form of human thought? For the ordinary mind which cannot conceive of events except as following one another in time, the succession of births is as true as everything else. The higher kinds of knowledge, such as are repeatedly indicated in the Buddha's discourse, though they are not described because language is incapable of describing them, may not be bound in this way by the idea of time and may see that the essential truth is not so much a series of births in which something persists and passes from existence to existence, as the timeless fact that life depends upon *taṇhā*, the desire for life. Death, that is the breaking up of such constituents of human life as the body, states of consciousness, etc., does not affect *taṇhā*. If *taṇhā* has not been deliberately suppressed, it collects *skandhas* again. The result is called a new individual. But the essential truth is the persistence of the *taṇhā* until it is destroyed.

Still there is no doubt that the earliest Buddhist texts and the discourse ascribed to the Buddha himself speak, when using ordinary untechnical language, of rebirth and of a man dying and being born in such and such a state. Only we must not suppose that the man's self is continued or transferred in this operation. There is no entity that can be called soul and strictly speaking no entity that can be called body, only a variable aggregation of *skandhas*, constantly changing. At death this collocation disperses but a new one reassembles under the influence of *taṇhā*, the desire of life, and by the law of karma which prescribes that every act must have its result. The illustration that comes most naturally is that of water. Waves pass across the surface of the sea and successive waves are not the same, nor is what we call the same wave really the same at two different points in its progress, and yet one wave causes another wave and transmits its form and movement. So are beings travelling through the world (*saṃsāra*) not the same at any two points in a single life and still less the same in two consecutive lives: yet it is the impetus and form of the previous lives, the desire that urges them and the form that it takes, which determine the character of the succeeding lives.

But Buddhist writers more commonly illustrate rebirth by fire than by water and this simile is used with others in the Questions of Milinda. We cannot assume that this book reflects the views of the Buddha or his immediate followers, but it is the work of an Indian in touch with good tradition who lived a few centuries later and expressed his opinions with lucidity. It denies the existence of transmigration and of the soul and then proceeds to illustrate by metaphors and analogies how two successive lives can be the same and yet not the same. For instance, suppose a man carelessly allows his lamp to set his thatch on fire with the result that a whole village is

burnt down. He is held responsible for the loss but when brought before the judge argues that the flame of his lamp was not the same as the flame that burnt down the village. Will such a plea be allowed? Certainly not. Or to take another metaphor. Suppose a man were to choose a young girl in marriage and after making a contract with her parents were to go away, waiting for her to grow up. Meanwhile another man comes and marries her. If the two men appeal to the King and the later suitor says to the earlier, The little child whom you chose and paid for is one and the full grown girl whom I paid for and married is another, no one would listen to his argument, for clearly the young woman has grown out of the girl and in ordinary language they are the same person. Or again suppose that one man left a jar of milk with another and the milk turned to curds. Would it be reasonable for the first man to accuse the second of theft because the milk has disappeared?

The caterpillar and butterfly might supply another illustration. It is unfortunate that the higher intelligences offer no example of such metamorphosis in which consciousness is apparently interrupted between the two stages. Would an intelligent caterpillar take an interest in his future welfare as a butterfly and stigmatize as vices indulgences pleasant to his caterpillar senses and harmful only to the coming butterfly, between whom and the caterpillar there is perhaps no continuity of consciousness? We can imagine how strongly butterflies would insist that the foundation of morality is that caterpillars should realize that the butterflies' interests and their own are the same.

3

When the Buddha contemplated the *samsāra*, the world of change and transmigration in which there is nothing permanent, nothing satisfying, nothing that can be called a self, he formulated his chief conclusions, theoretical and practical, in four propositions known as the four noble truths, concerning suffering, the cause of suffering, the extinction of suffering, and the path to the extinction of suffering. These truths are always represented as the essential and indispensable part of Buddhism. Without them, says the Buddha more than once, there can be no emancipation, and agreeably to this we find them represented as having formed part of the teaching of previous Buddhas and consequently as being rediscovered rather than invented by Gotama. He even compares himself to one who has found in the jungle the site of an ancient city and caused it to be restored. It would therefore not be surprising if they were found in pre-Buddhist writings, and it has been pointed out that they are practically identical with the four divisions of the Hindu science of medicine: *roga*, disease; *rogahetu*, the cause of disease; *arogya*, absence of disease; *bhaisajya*, medicine. A similar parallel between the language of medicine and moral science can be found in the Yoga philosophy, and if the fourfold division of medicine can be shown to be anterior to Buddhism, it may well have suggested the mould in which the four truths were cast. The comparison of life and passion to disease is frequent in Buddhist writings and the Buddha is sometimes hailed as the King of Physicians. It is a just compendium of his doctrine—so far as an illustration can be a compendium—to say that human life is like a diseased body which requires to be cured by a proper regimen. But the Buddha's claim to originality is not thereby affected, for it rests upon just this, that he was able to regard life and religion in this spirit and to put aside the systems of ritual, speculation and self-mortification which were being preached all round him.

The first truth is that existence involves suffering. It receives emotional expression in a discourse in the *Samyutta-Nikāya*. "The world of transmigration, my disciples, has its beginning in eternity. No origin can be perceived, from which beings start, and hampered by ignorance, fettered by craving, stray and wander. Which think you are more—the tears which you have shed as you strayed and wandered on this long journey, grieving and weeping because you were bound to what you hated and separated from what you loved—which are more, these tears, or the waters in the four oceans? A mother's death, a son's death, a daughter's death, loss of kinsmen, loss of property, sickness, all these have you endured through long ages—and while you felt these losses and strayed and wandered on this long journey, grieving and weeping

because you were bound to what you hated and separated from what you loved, the tears that you shed are more than the water in the four oceans.”

It is remarkable that such statements aroused no contradiction. The Buddha was not an isolated and discontented philosopher, like Schopenhauer in his hotel, but the leader of an exceptionally successful religious movement in touch and sympathy with popular ideas. On many points his assertions called forth discussion and contradiction but when he said that all existence involves suffering no one disputed the dictum: no one talked of the pleasures of life or used those arguments which come so copiously to the healthy-minded modern essayist when he devotes a page or two to disproving pessimism. On this point the views and temperament of the Buddha were clearly those of educated India. The existence of this conviction and temperament in a large body of intellectual men is as important as the belief in the value of life and the love of activity for its own sake which is common among Europeans. Both tempers must be taken into account by every theory which is not merely personal but endeavours to ascertain what the human race think and feel about existence.

The sombre and meditative cast of Indian thought is not due to physical degeneration or a depressing climate. Many authors speak as if the Hindus lived in a damp relaxing heat in which physical and moral stamina alike decay. I myself think that as to climate India is preferable to Europe, and without arguing about what must be largely a question of personal taste, one may point to the long record of physical and intellectual labour performed even by Europeans in India. Neither can it be maintained that in practice Buddhism destroys the joy and vigour of life. The Burmese are among the most cheerful people in the world and the Japanese among the most vigorous, and the latter are at least as much Buddhists as Europeans are Christians. It might be plausibly maintained that Europeans' love of activity is mainly due to the intolerable climate and uncomfortable institutions of their continent, which involve a continual struggle with the weather and continual discussion forbidding any calm and comprehensive view of things. The Indian being less troubled by these evils is able to judge what is the value of life in itself, as an experience for the individual, not as part of a universal struggle, which is the common view of seriously minded Europeans, though as to this struggle they have but hazy ideas of the antagonists, the cause and the result.

The Buddhist doctrine does not mean that life is something trifling and unimportant, to be lived anyhow. On the contrary, birth as a human being is an opportunity of inestimable value. He who is so born has at least a chance of hearing the truth and acquiring merit. “Hard is it to be born as a man, hard to come to hear the true law” and when the chance comes, the good fortune of the being who has attained to human form and the critical issues which depend on his using it rightly are dwelt on with an earnestness not surpassed in Christian homiletics. He who acts ill as a man may fall back into the dreary cycles of inferior births, among beasts and blind aimless beings who cannot understand the truth, even if they hear it. From this point of view human life is happiness, only like every form of existence it is not satisfying or permanent.

Dukkha is commonly rendered in English by pain or suffering, but an adequate literary equivalent which can be used consistently in translating is not forthcoming. The opposite state, sukha, is fairly rendered by well-being, satisfaction and happiness. Dukkha is the contrary of this: uneasiness, discomfort, difficulty. Pain or suffering are too strong as renderings, but no better are to hand. When the Buddha enlarges on the evils of the world it will be found that the point most emphasized as vitiating life is its transitoriness.

“Is that which is impermanent sorrow or joy?” he asks of his disciples. “Sorrow, Lord,” is the answer, and this oft-repeated proposition is always accepted as self-evident. The evils most frequently mentioned are the great incurable weaknesses of humanity, old age, sickness and death, and also the weariness of being tied to what we hate, the sadness of parting from what we love. Another obvious evil is that we cannot get what we want or achieve our ambitions. Thus the temper which prompts the Buddha's utterances is not that of Ecclesiastes—the melancholy of satiety which, having enjoyed all, finds that all is vanity—but rather the regretful verdict of one who while sympathizing with the nobler passions—love, ambition, the quest of knowledge—is forced to pronounce them unsatisfactory. The human mind craves after something which is

permanent, something of which it can say This is mine. It longs to be something or to produce something which is not transitory and which has an absolute value in and for itself. But neither in this world nor in any other world are such states and actions possible. Only in Nirvana do we find a state which rises above the transitory because it rises above desire. Not merely human life but all possible existences in all imaginable heavens must be unsatisfactory, for such existences are merely human life under favourable conditions. Some great evils, such as sickness, may be absent but life in heaven must come to an end: it is not eternal, it is not even permanent, it does not, any more than this life, contain anything that god or man can call his own. And it may be observed that when Christian writers attempt to describe the joys of a heaven which is eternally satisfying, they have mostly to fall back on negative phrases such as “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard.”

The European view of life differs from the Asiatic chiefly in attributing a value to actions in themselves, and in not being disturbed by the fact that their results are impermanent. It is, in fact, the theoretical side of the will to live, which can find expression in a treatise on metaphysics as well as in an act of procreation. An Englishman according to his capacity and mental culture is satisfied with some such rule of existence as having a good time, or playing the game, or doing his duty, or working for some cause. The majority of intelligent men are prepared to devote their lives to the service of the British Empire: the fact that it must pass away as certainly as the Empire of Babylon and that they are labouring for what is impermanent does not disturb them and is hardly ever present to their minds. Those Europeans who share with Asiatics some feeling of dissatisfaction with the impermanent try to escape it by an unselfish morality and by holding that life, which is unsatisfactory if regarded as a pursuit of happiness, acquires a new and real value if lived for others. And from this point of view the European moralist is apt to criticize the Buddhist truths of suffering and the release from suffering as selfish. But Buddhism is as full as or fuller than Christianity of love, self-sacrifice and thought for others. It says that it is a fine thing to be a man and have the power of helping others: that the best life is that which is entirely unselfish and a continual sacrifice. But looking at existence as a whole, and accepting the theory that the happiest and best life is a life of self-sacrifice, it declines to consider as satisfactory the world in which this principle holds good. Many of the best Europeans would probably say that their ideal is not continual personal enjoyment but activity which makes the world better. But this ideal implies a background of evil just as much as does the Buddha's teaching. If evil vanished, the ideal would vanish too.

There is one important negative aspect of the truth of suffering and indeed of all the four truths. A view of human life which is common in Christian and Mohammedan countries represents man as put in the world by God, and human life as a service to be rendered to God. Whether it is pleasant, worth living or not are hardly questions for God's servants. There is no trace of such a view in the Buddha's teaching. It is throughout assumed that man in judging human life by human standards is not presumptuous or blind to higher issues. Life involves unhappiness: that is a fact, a cardinal truth. That this unhappiness may be ordered for disciplinary or other mysterious motives by what is vaguely called One above, that it would disappear or be explained if we could contemplate our world as forming part of a larger universe, that “there is some far off divine event,” some unexpected solution in the fifth act of this complicated tragedy, which could justify the creator of this *dukkhakkhandha*, this mass of unhappiness—for all such ideas the doctrine of the Blessed One has nothing but silence, the courteous and charitable silence which will not speak contemptuously. The world of transmigration has neither beginning nor end nor meaning: to those who wish to escape from it the Buddha can show the way: of obligation to stop in it there can be no question.

Buddhism is often described as pessimistic, but is the epithet just? What does it mean? The dictionary defines pessimism as the doctrine which teaches that the world is as bad as it can be and that everything naturally tends towards evil. That is emphatically not Buddhist teaching. The higher forms of religion have their basis and origin in the existence of evil, but their justification and value depend on their power to remove it. A religion, therefore, can never be pessimistic, just as a doctor who should simply pronounce diseases to be incurable would never

be successful as a practitioner. The Buddha states with the utmost frankness that religion is dependent on the existence of evil. "If three things did not exist, the Buddha would not appear in the world and his law and doctrine would not shine. What are the three? Birth, old age and death." This is true. If there were people leading perfectly happy, untroubled lives, it is not likely that any thought of religion would enter their minds, and their irreligious attitude would be reasonable, for the most that any deity is asked to give is perfect happiness, and that these imaginary folk are supposed to have already. But according to Buddhism no form of existence can be perfectly happy or permanent. Gods and angels may be happier than men but they are not free from the tyranny of desire and ultimately they must fall from their high estate and pass away.

4

The second Truth declares the origin of suffering. "It is," says the Buddha, "the thirst which causes rebirth, which is accompanied by pleasure and lust and takes delight now here, now there; namely, the thirst for pleasure, the thirst for another life, the thirst for success." This Thirst (Tanhâ) is the craving for life in the widest sense: the craving for pleasure which propagates life, the craving for existence in the dying man which brings about another birth, the craving for wealth, for power, for pre-eminence within the limits of the present life. What is the nature of this craving and of its action? Before attempting to answer we must consider what is known as the chain of causation, one of the oldest, most celebrated, and most obscure formulæ of Buddhism. It is stated that the Buddha knew it before attaining enlightenment, but it is second in importance only to the four truths, and in the opening sections of the Mahâvagga, he is represented as meditating on it under the Bo-tree, both in its positive and negative form. It runs as follows: "From ignorance come the sankhâras, from the sankhâras comes consciousness, from consciousness come name-and-form, from name-and-form come the six provinces (of the senses), from the six provinces comes contact, from contact comes sensation, from sensation comes craving, from craving comes clinging, from clinging comes existence, from existence comes birth, from birth come old age and death, pain and lamentation, suffering, sorrow, and despair. This is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. But by the destruction of ignorance, effected by the complete absence of lust, the sankhâras are destroyed, by the destruction of the sankhâras, consciousness is destroyed" and so on through the whole chain backwards.

The chain is also known as the twelve Nidânas or causes. It is clearly in its positive and negative forms an amplification of the second and third truths respectively, or perhaps they are a luminous compendium of it.

Besides the full form quoted above there are shorter versions. Sometimes there are only nine links or there are five links combined in an endless chain. So we must not attach too much importance to the number or order of links. The chain is not a genealogy but a statement respecting the interdependence of certain stages and aspects of human nature. And though the importance of cause (hetu) is often emphasized, the causal relation is understood in a wider sense than is usual in our idiom. If there were no birth, there would be no death, but though birth and death are interdependent we should hardly say that birth is the cause of death.

In whatever way we take the Chain of Causation, it seems to bring a being into existence twice, and this is the view of Buddhaghosa who says that the first two links (ignorance and the sankhâras) belong to past time and explain the present existence: the next eight (consciousness to existence) analyse the present existence: and the last two (birth and old age) belong to future time, representing the results in another existence of desire felt in this existence. And that is perhaps what the constructor of the formula meant. It is clearest if taken backwards. Suppose, the Buddha once said to Ânanda, there were no birth, would there then be any old age or death? Clearly not. That is the meaning of saying that old age and death depend on birth: if birth were annihilated, they too would be annihilated. Similarly birth depends on Bhava which means becoming and does not imply anything self-existent and stationary: all the world is a continual process of coming into existence and passing away. It is on the universality of this process that birth (jâti) depends. But on what does the endless becoming itself depend? We seem here on the

threshold of the deepest problems but the answer, though of wide consequences, brings us back to the strictly human and didactic sphere. Existence depends on Upâdâna. This word means literally grasping or clinging to and should be so translated here but it also means fuel and its use is coloured by this meaning, since Buddhist metaphor is fond of describing life as a flame. Existence cannot continue without the clinging to life, just as fire cannot continue without fuel.

The clinging in its turn depends on Taṇhâ, the thirst or craving for existence. The distinction between taṇhâ and upâdâna is not always observed, and it is often said taṇhâ is the cause of karma or of sorrow. But, strictly speaking, upâdâna is the grasping at life or pleasure: taṇhâ is the incessant, unsatisfied craving which causes it. It is compared to the birana, a weed which infests rice fields and sends its roots deep into the ground. So long as the smallest piece of root is left the weed springs up again and propagates itself with surprising rapidity, though the cultivator thought he had exterminated it. This metaphor is also used to illustrate how taṇhâ leads to a new birth. Death is like cutting down the plant: the root remains and sends up another growth.

We now seem to have reached an ultimate principle and basis, namely, the craving for life which transcends the limits of one existence and finds expression in birth after birth. Many passages in the Pitakas justify the idea that the force which constructs the universe of our experience is an impersonal appetite, analogous to the Will of Schopenhauer. The shorter formula quoted above in which it is said that the sankhâras come from taṇhâ also admits of such an interpretation. But the longer chain does not, or at least it considers taṇhâ not as a cosmic force but simply as a state of the human mind. Suffering can be traced back to the fact that men have desire. To what is desire due? To sensation. With this reply we leave the great mysteries at which the previous links seemed to hint and begin one of those enquiries into the origin and meaning of human sensation which are dear to early Buddhism. Just as there could be no birth if there were no existence, so there could be no desire if there were no sensation. What then is the cause of sensation? Contact (phasso). This word plays a considerable part in Buddhist psychology and is described as producing not only sensation but perception and volition (cetanâ). Contact in its turn depends on the senses (that is the five senses as we know them, and mind as a sixth) and these depend on name-and-form. This expression, which occurs in the Upanishads as well as in Buddhist writings, denotes mental and corporeal life. In explaining it the commentators say that form means the four elements and shape derived from them and that name means the three skandhas of sensation, perception and the sankhâras. This use of the word nâma probably goes back to ancient superstitions which regarded a man's name as containing his true being but in Buddhist terminology it is merely a technical expression for mental states collectively. Buddhaghosa observes that name-and-form are like the playing of a lute which does not come from any store of sound and when it ceases does not go to form a store of sound elsewhere.

On what do name-and-form depend? On consciousness. This point is so important that in teaching Ânanda the Buddha adds further explanations. "Suppose," he says, "consciousness were not to descend into the womb, would name-and-form consolidate in the womb? No, Lord. Therefore, Ânanda, consciousness is the cause, the occasion, the origin of name-and-form." But consciousness according to the Buddha's teaching is not a unity, a thinking soul, but mental activity produced by various appropriate causes. Hence it cannot be regarded as independent of name-and-form and as their generator. So the Buddha goes on to say that though name-and-form depend on consciousness it is equally true that consciousness depends on name-and-form. The two together make human life: everything that is born, and dies or is reborn in another existence, is name-and-form plus consciousness.

What we have learnt hitherto is that suffering depends on desire and desire on the senses. For didactic purposes this is much, but as philosophy the result is small: we have merely discovered that the world depends on name-and-form plus consciousness, that is on human beings. The first two links of the chain (the last in our examination) do not leave the previous point of view—the history of individual life and not an account of the world process—but they have at least that interest which attaches to the mysterious.

“Consciousness depends on the sankhâras.” Here the sankhâras seem to mean the predispositions anterior to consciousness which accompany birth and hence are equivalent to one meaning of Karma, that is the good and bad qualities and tendencies which appear when rebirth takes place. Perhaps the best commentary on the statement that consciousness depends on the sankhâras is furnished by a Sutta called Rebirth according to the sankhâras. The Buddha there says that if a monk possessed of the necessary good qualities cherishes a wish to be born after death as a noble, or in one of the many heavens, “then those predispositions (sankhâra) and mental conditions (vihâro) if repeated conduce to rebirth” in the place he desires. Similarly when Citta is dying, the spirits of the wood come round his death-bed and bid him wish to be an Emperor in his next life. Thus a personality with certain predispositions and aptitudes may be due to the thought and wishes of a previous personality, and these predispositions, asserts the last article of the formula, depend upon ignorance. We might be tempted to identify this ignorance with some cosmic creative force such as the Unconscious of Hartmann or the Mâyâ of Śankara. But though the idea that the world of phenomena is a delusion bred of ignorance is common in India, it does not enter into the formula which we are considering. Two explanations of the first link are given in the Pitakas, which are practically the same. One states categorically that the ignorance which produces the sankhâras is not to know the four Truths. Elsewhere the Buddha himself when asked what ignorance means replies that it is not to know that everything must have an origin and a cessation. The formula means that it is ignorance of the true nature of the world and the true interests of mankind that brings about the suffering which we see and feel. We were born into the world because of our ignorance in our last birth and of the desire for re-existence which was in us when we died.

Of the supreme importance attached to this doctrine of causation there can be no doubt. Perhaps the best instance is the story of Sâriputta’s conversion. In the early days of the Buddha’s mission he asked for a brief summary of the new teaching and in reply the essential points were formulated in the well-known verses which declare that all things have a cause and an end. Such utterances sound like a scientific dictum about the uniformity of nature or cosmic law. But though the Pitakas imply some such idea, they seem to shrink from stating it clearly. They do not emphasize the orderly course of nature or exhort men to live in harmony with it. We are given to understand that the intelligence of those supermen who are called Buddhas sees that the four Truths are a consequence of the nature of the universe but subsequent instruction bids us attend to the truths themselves and not to their connection with the universal scheme. One reason for this is that Indians were little inclined to think of impersonal laws and forces. The law of karma and the periodic rhythm of growth and decay which the universe obeys are ideas common to Hinduism and Buddhism and not incompatible with the mythology and ritual to which the Buddha objected. And though the Pitakas insist on the universality of causation, they have no notion of the uniformity of nature in our sense. The Buddhist doctrine of causation states that we cannot obtain emancipation and happiness unless we understand and remove the cause of our distress, but it does not discuss cosmic forces like karma and Mâyâ. Such discussion the Buddha considered unprofitable and perhaps he may have felt that insistence on cosmic law came dangerously near to fatalism.

Though the number of the links may be varied the Buddha attached importance to the method of concatenation and the impersonal formulation of the whole and in one passage he objects to the questions, what are old age and death and who is it that has old age and death. Though the chain of causation treats of a human life, it never speaks of a person being born or growing old and Buddhaghosa observes that the Wheel of existence is without known beginning, without a personal cause or passive recipient and empty with a twelvefold emptiness. It has no external cause such as Brahma or any deity “and is also wanting in any ego passively recipient of happiness and misery.”

The twelve Nidânas have passed into Buddhist art as the Wheel of Life. An ancient example of this has been discovered in the frescoes of Ajanta and modern diagrams, which represent the explanations current in mediæval India, are still to be found in Tibet and Japan. In the nave of the wheel are three female figures signifying passion, hatred and folly and in the spaces

between the spokes are scenes depicting the phases of human life: round the felly runs a series of pictures representing the twelve links of the chain. The first two links are represented by a blind man or blind camel and by a potter making pots. The third, or consciousness, is an ape. Some have thought that this figure represents the evolution of mind, which begins to show itself in animals and is perfected in man. It may however refer to a simile found in the Pitakas where the restless, changeable mind is compared to a monkey jumping about in a tree.

5

We have now examined three of the four Truths, for the Chain of Causation in its positive form gives us the origin of suffering and in its negative form the facts as to the extinction of suffering: it teaches that as its links are broken suffering disappears. The fourth truth, or the way which leads to the extinction of suffering, gives practical directions to this effect. The way is the Noble Eightfold Path consisting of: right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right rapture. This formula is comparable not with the Decalogue, to which correspond the precepts for monks and laymen, but rather with the Beatitudes. It contains no commands or prohibitions but in the simplest language indicates the spirit that leads to emancipation. It breathes an air of noble freedom. It says nothing about laws and rites: it simply states that the way to be happy is to have a good heart and mind, taking shape in good deeds and at last finding expression and fulfilment in the rapture of ecstasy. We may think the numerical subdivisions of the Path pedantic and find fault with its want of definition, for it does not define the word right (*sammâ*) which it uses so often, but in thus ignoring ceremonialism and legalism and making simple goodness in spirit and deed the basis of religion. Gotama rises above all his contemporaries and above all subsequent teachers except Christ. In detaching the perfect life from all connection with a deity or outside forces and in teaching man that the worst and best that can happen to him lie within his own power, he holds a unique position.

Indian thought has little sympathy with the question whether morality is utilitarian or intuitionist, whether we do good to benefit ourselves or whether certain acts and states are intrinsically good. The Buddha is a physician who prescribes a cure for a disease—the disease of suffering—and that cure is not a quack medicine which pretends to heal rapidly but a regime and treatment. If we ask whether the reason for following the regime is that it is good for us or that it is scientifically correct; or why we want to be well or whether health is really good: both the Buddha and the physician would reply that such questions are tiresome and irrelevant. With an appearance of profundity, they ask nothing worth answering. The eightfold path is the way and the only way of salvation. Its form depends on the fact that the knowledge of the Buddha, which embraces the whole universe, sees that it is a consequence of the nature of things. In that sense it may be described as an eternal law, but this is not the way in which the Pitakas usually speak of it and it is not represented as a divine revelation dictated by other than human motives. “Come, disciples,” the Buddha was wont to say, “lead a holy life for the complete extinction of suffering.” Holiness is simply the way out of misery into happiness. To ask why we should take that way, would seem to an Indian an unnecessary question, as it might seem to a Christian if he were asked why he wants to save his soul, but if the question is pressed, the answer must be at every point, for the Christian as much as for the Buddhist, to gain happiness. Incidentally the happiness of others is fully cared for, since both religions make unselfishness the basis of morality and hold that the conscious and selfish pursuit of happiness is not the way to gain it, but if we choose to apply European methods of analysis to the Buddha’s preaching, it is utilitarian. But the fact that he and his first disciples did not think such analysis and discussion necessary goes far to show that the temper created in his Order was not religiously utilitarian. It never occurred to them to look at things that way.

The eightfold path is the road to happiness but it is the way, not the destination, and the action of the Buddha and his disciples is something beyond it. They had obtained the goal, for they were all Arhats, and they might, if they had been inspired by that selfishness which some

European authors find prominent in Buddhism, have entered into their rest. Yet the Buddha bade them go among men and preach “for the gain and welfare of many” and they continued their benevolent activity although it could add nothing to the reward which they had already won.

The Buddha often commented on the eightfold path, and we may follow one of the expositions attributed to him. What, he asks, is meant by right views (*Sammâditt̃hi*)? Simply a knowledge of the four truths, and of such doctrines about personality and karma as are implied in them. But the negative aspects of this *Sammâditt̃hi* are more striking than the positive. It does not imply any philosophical or metaphysical system: the Buddha has shaken off all philosophical theories. Secondly, it does not imply that any knowledge or belief is of efficacy in itself, as the lore of the Brahmins is supposed to be or those Christian creeds which save by faith. The Buddha has not a position such as the Church attributes to Christ, or later Buddhism to Amida. All that is required under the head of right belief is a knowledge of the general principles and programme of Buddhism.

The Buddha continues, What is right resolve? It is the resolve to renounce pleasures, to bear no malice and do no harm. What is right speech? To abstain from lying and slandering, harsh words and foolish chatter. What is right conduct? To abstain from taking life, from stealing, from immorality. What is right livelihood? To abandon wrong occupations and get one’s living by a right occupation. This is elsewhere defined as one that does not bring hurt or danger to any living thing, and five bad occupations are enumerated, namely, those of a caravan-trader, slave-dealer, butcher, publican and poison seller. European critics of Buddhism have often found fault with its ethics as being a morality of renunciation, and in the explanation epitomized above each section of the path is interpreted in this way. But this negative form is not a peculiarity of Buddhism. Only two of the commandments in our Decalogue are positive precepts; the rest are prohibitions. The same is true of most early codes. The negative form is at once easier and more practical for it requires a mental effort to formulate any ideal of human life; it is comparatively easy to note the bad things people do, and say, don’t. The pruning of the feelings, the cutting off of every tendril which can cling to the pleasures of sense, is an essential part of that mental cultivation in which the higher Buddhism consists. But the Pitakas say clearly that what is to be eliminated is only bad mental states. Desire for pleasure and striving after wealth are bad, but it does not follow that desire and striving are bad in themselves. Desire for what is good (Dhammachando as opposed to Kâmachando) is itself good, and the effort to obtain nirvana is often described as a struggle or wrestling. Similarly though absolute indifference to pains and pleasures is the ideal for a Bhikkhu, this by no means implies, as is often assumed, a general insensibility and indifference, the harmless oyster-like life of one who hurts nobody and remains in his own shell. European criticisms on the selfishness and pessimism of Buddhism forget the cheerfulness and buoyancy which are the chief marks of its holy men. The Buddhist saint is essentially one who has freed himself. His first impulse is to rejoice in his freedom and share it with others, not to abuse the fetters he has cut away. Active benevolence and love are enjoined as a duty and praised in language of no little beauty and earnestness. In the Itivuttaka the following is put into the mouth of Buddha. “All good works whatever are not worth one sixteenth part of love which sets free the heart. Love which sets free the heart comprises them: it shines, gives light and radiance. Just as the light of all the stars is not worth one sixteenth of the light of the moon: as in the last month of the rains in the season of autumn, when the sky is clear and cloudless the sun mounts up on high and overcomes darkness in the firmament: as in the last hour of the night when the dawn is breaking, the morning star shines and gives light and radiance: even so does love which sets free the soul and comprises all good works, shine and give light and radiance.” So, too, the Sutta-Nipâta bids a man love not only his neighbour but all the world. “As a mother at the risk of her life watches over her own child, her only child, so let every one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings.” Nor are such precepts left vague and universal. If some of his acts and words seem wanting in family affection, the Buddha enjoined filial piety as emphatically as Moses or Confucius. There are two beings, he says, namely Father and Mother, who can never be adequately repaid. If a man were to carry

his parents about on his shoulders for a hundred years or could give them all the kingdoms and treasures of the earth, he still would not discharge his debt of gratitude. But whereas Confucius said that the good son does not deviate from the way of his father, the Buddha, who was by no means conservative in religious matters, said that the only way in which a son could repay his parents was by teaching them the True Law.

The Buddha defines the sixth section of the path more fully than those which precede. Right effort, he says, is when a monk makes an effort, and strives to prevent evil states of mind from arising: to suppress them if they have arisen: to produce good states of mind, and develop and perfect them. Hitherto we have been considering morality, indispensable but elementary. This section is the beginning of the specially Buddhist discipline of mental cultivation. The process is apt to seem too self-conscious: we wonder if a freer growth would not yield better fruits. But in a comparison with the similar programmes of other religions Buddhism has little to fear. Its methods are not morbid or introspective: it does not fetter the intellect with the bonds of authority. The disciple has simply to discriminate between good and bad thoughts, to develop the one and suppress the other. It is noticeable that under this heading of right effort, or right wrestling as it is sometimes called, both desire and striving for good ends are consecrated. Sloth and torpor are as harmful to spiritual progress as evil desires and as often reprimanded. Also the aim is not merely negative: it is partly creative. The disciple is not to suppress will and feeling, but he is to make all the good in him grow; he should foster, increase and perfect it.

What is right-mindfulness, the seventh section of the path? It is "When a monk lives as regards the body, observant of the body, strenuous, conscious, mindful and has rid himself of covetousness and melancholy": and similarly as regards the sensations, the mind and phenomena. The importance of this mindfulness is often insisted on. It amounts to complete self-mastery by means of self-knowledge which allows nothing to be done heedlessly and mechanically and controls not merely recognized acts of volition but also those sense-impressions in which we are apt to regard the mind as merely receptive. "Self is the lord of self: who else should be the lord? With self well subdued, a man finds a lord such as few can find."

Although the Buddha denies that there is any soul or self (*attā*) apart from the *skandhas*, yet here his ethical system seems to assume that a ruling principle which may be called self does exist. Nor is the discrepancy fully explained by saying that the non-existence of self or soul is the correct dogma and that expressions like self being the lord of self are concessions to the exigencies of exposition. The evolution of the self-controlled saint out of the confused mental states of the ordinary man is a psychological difficulty. As we shall see, when the eightfold path has been followed to the end new powers arise in the mind, new lights stream into it. Yet if there is no self or soul, where do they arise, into what do they stream?

The doctrine of Gotama as expressed in his earliest utterance on the subject to the five monks at Benares is that neither the body, nor any mental faculty to which a name can be given, is what was called in Brahmanic theology *âtman*, that is to say an entity which is absolutely free, imperishable, changeless and not subject to pain. This of course does not exclude the possibility that there may be something which does not come under any of the above categories and which may be such an entity as described. Indeed Brahmanic works which teach the existence of the *âtman* often use language curiously like that of Buddhism. Thus the *Bhagavad-gîtâ* says that actions are performed by the *Guṇas* and only he who is deluded by egoism thinks "I am the doer." And the *Vishnu Purana* objects to the use of personal pronouns. "When one soul is dispersed in all bodies, it is idle to ask who are you, who am I?" The accounts of the Buddhist higher life would be easier to understand if we could suppose that there is such a self: that the pilgrim who is walking in the paths gradually emancipates, develops and builds it up: that it becomes partly free in nirvana before death and wholly free after death. Schrader has pointed out texts in the *Pitakas* which seem to imply that there is something which is absolute and therefore not touched by the doctrine of *anattâ*. In a remarkable passage the Buddha says: Therefore my disciples get rid of what is not yours. To get rid of it will mean your health and happiness for a long time. Form, sensation, perception, etc., are not yours; get rid of them. If a man were to take away, or burn, or use for his needs, all the grass, and boughs, and branches and

leaves in this Jeta wood, would it ever occur to you to say, the man is taking *us* away, burning *us*, or using *us* for his needs? Certainly not, Lord. And why not? Because, Lord, it is not our self or anything belonging to our self. Just in the same way, replies the Buddha, get rid of the skandhas. The natural sense of this seems to be that the skandhas have no more to do with the real being of man than have the trees of the forest where he happens to be. This suggests that there is in man something real and permanent, to be contrasted with the transitory skandhas and when the Buddha asks whether anything which is perishable and changeable can be called the self, he seems to imply that there is somewhere such a self. But this point cannot be pressed, for it is perfectly logical to define first of all what you mean by a ghost and then to prove that such a thing does not exist. If we take the passages at present collected as a whole, and admit that they are somewhat inconsistent or imperfectly understood, the net result is hardly that the name of self can be given to some part of human nature which remains when the skandhas are set on one side.

But though the Buddha denied that there is in man anything permanent which can be called the self, this does not imply a denial that human nature can by mental training be changed into something different, something infinitely superior to the nature of the ordinary man, perhaps something other than the skandhas. One of his principal objections to the doctrine of the permanent self was that, if it were true, emancipation and sanctity would be impossible, because human nature could not be changed. In India the doctrine of the *âtman* was really dangerous, because it led a religious man to suppose that to ensure happiness and emancipation it is only necessary to isolate the *âtman* by self-mortification and by suppressing discursive thought as well as passion. But this, the Buddha teaches, is a capital error. That which can make an end of suffering is not something lurking ready-made in human nature but something that must be built up: man must be reborn, not flayed and stripped of everything except some core of unchanging soul. As to the nature of this new being the Pitakas are reticent, but not absolutely silent, as we shall see below. Our loose use of language might possibly lead us to call the new being a soul, but it is decidedly not an *âtman*, for it is something which has been brought into being by deliberate effort. The collective name for these higher states of mind is *paññâ*, wisdom or knowledge. This word is the Pali equivalent of the Sanskrit *prajñâ* and is interesting as connecting early and later Buddhism, for *prajñâ* in the sense of transcendental or absolute knowledge plays a great part in Mahayanism and is even personified.

The Pitakas imply that Buddhas and Arhats can understand things which the ordinary human mind cannot grasp and human words cannot utter. Later Indian Buddhists had no scruples in formulating what the master left unformulated. They did not venture to use the words *âtman* or *attâ*, but they said that the saint can rise above all difference and plurality, transcend the distinction between subject and object and that nirvana is the absolute (*Bhûtatathatâ*). The Buddha would doubtless have objected to this terminology as he objected to all attempts to express the ineffable but perhaps the thought which struggles for expression in such language is not far removed from his own thought.

One of the common Buddhist similes for human life is fire and it is the best simile for illuminating all Buddhist psychology. To insist on finding a soul is like describing flames as substances. Fire is often spoken of as an element but it is really a process which cannot be isolated or interrupted. A flame is not the same as its fuel and it can be distinguished from other flames. But though you can individualize it and propagate it indefinitely, you cannot isolate it from its fuel and keep it by itself. Even so in the human being there is not any soul which can be isolated and go on living eternally but the analogy of the flame still holds good. Unseizable though a flame may be, and undefinable as substance, it is not unreasonable to trim a fire and make a flame rise above its fuel, free from smoke, clear and pure. If it were a conscious flame, such might be its own ideal.

The eighth and last section of the path is *sammâ-samâdhi*, right concentration or rapture. Mental concentration is essential to *samâdhi*, which is the opposite of those wandering desires often blamed as seeking for pleasure here and there. But *samâdhi* is more than mere concentration or even meditation and may be rendered by rapture or ecstasy, though like so

many technical Buddhist terms it does not correspond exactly to any European word. It takes in Buddhism the place occupied in other religions by prayer—prayer, that is, in the sense of ecstatic communion with the divine being. The sermon which the Buddha preached to King Ajâtasattu on the fruits of the life of a recluse gives an eloquent account of the joys of samâdhi. He describes how a monk seats himself in the shade of a tree or in some mountain glen and then “keeping his body erect and his intelligence alert and intent” purifies his mind from all lust, ill-temper, sloth, fretfulness and perplexity. When these are gone, he is like a man freed from jail or debt, gladness rises in his heart and he passes successively through four stages of meditation. Then his whole mind and even his body is permeated with a feeling of purity and peace. He concentrates his thoughts and is able to apply them to such great matters as he may select. He may revel in the enjoyment of supernatural powers, for we cannot deny that the oldest documents which we possess credit the sage with miraculous gifts, though they attach little importance to them, or he may follow the train of thought which led the Buddha himself to enlightenment. He thinks of his previous births and remembers them as clearly as a man who has been a long walk remembers at the end of the day the villages through which he has passed. He thinks of the birth and deaths of other beings and sees them as plainly as a man on the top of a house sees the people moving in the streets below. He realizes the full significance of the four truths and he understands the origin and cessation of the three great evils, love of pleasure, love of existence and ignorance. And when he thus sees and knows, his heart is set free. “And in him thus set free there arises the knowledge of his freedom and he knows that rebirth has been destroyed, the higher life has been led, what had to be done has been done. He has no more to do with this life. Just as if in a mountain fastness there were a pool of water, clear, translucent and serene and a man standing on the bank and with eyes to see should perceive the mussels and the shells, the gravel and pebbles and the shoals of fish as they move about or lie within it.”

Similar accounts occur in many other passages with variations in the number of stages described. We must not therefore insist on the details as essential. But in all cases the process is marked by mental activity. The meditations of Indian recluses are often described as self-hypnotism, and I shall say something on this point elsewhere, but it is clear that in giving the above account the Buddha did not contemplate any mental condition in which the mind ceases to be active or master of itself. When, at the beginning, the monk sits down to meditate it is “with intelligence alert and intent”: in the last stage he has the sense of freedom, of duty done, and of knowledge immediate and unbounded, which sees the whole world spread below like a clear pool in which every fish and pebble is visible.

6

With this stage he attains Nirvâna, the best known word and the most difficult to explain in all the vocabulary of Buddhism.

It is perhaps used more by western students than by oriental believers and it belongs to the same department of religious language as the word saint. For most Christians there is something presumptuous in trying to be a saint or in defining the precise form of bliss enjoyed by saints in heaven and it is the same with nirvana. Yet no one denies that sanctity and nirvana are religious ideals. In a passage already quoted, Gotama described how in attaining Buddhahood he sought and arrived at the incomparable security of nirvana in which there is no birth, age, sickness, death, pain or defilement. This, confirmed by many other statements, shows that nirvana is a state attainable in this existence and compatible with a life of intellectual and physical exertion such as he himself led. The original meaning is the state of peace and happiness in which the fires of lust, hatred and stupidity are extinguished and the participle *nibbuto* apparently derived from the same root had passed into popular language in the sense of happy. Two forms of nirvana are distinguished. The first is upâdi-sesa-nibbânam or nirvana in which the skandhas remain, although passion is destroyed. This state is also called arhatship, the condition of an arhat, meaning originally a worthy or venerable man, and the person enjoying it is alive. The idea that the emancipated saint who has attained the goal still lingers in the world, though no

longer of the world, and teaches others, is common to all Indian religions. With the death of an arhat comes the state known as an-upâdi-sesa-nibbânam in which no skandhas remain. It is also called Parinibbânam and this word and the participle parinibbuto are frequently used with special reference to the death of the Buddha. The difference between the two forms of nirvana is important though the second is only the continuation of the first. Nirvana in this life admits of approximate definition: it is the goal of the religious life, though only the elect can even enter the struggle. Nirvana after death is not a goal in the same sense. The correct doctrine is rather that death is indifferent to one who has obtained nirvana and the difficulty of defining his nature after death does not mean that he has been striving for something inexplicable and illusory.

Arhatship is the aim and sum of the Buddha's teaching: it is associated in many passages with love for others, with wisdom, and happiness and is a condition of perfection attainable in this life. The passages in the Pitakas which seem to be the oldest and the most historical suggest that the success of the Buddha was due to the fact that he substituted for the chilly ideal of the Indian Munis something more inspiring and more visibly fruitful, something akin to what Christ called the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus we are told in the Vinaya that Bhaddiya was found sitting at the foot of a tree and exclaiming ecstatically, O happiness, happiness. When asked the reason of these ejaculations, he replied that formerly when he was a raja he was anxious and full of fear but that now, even when alone in the forest, he had become tranquil and calm, "with mind as peaceful as an antelope's."

Nirvana is frequently described by such adjectives as deathless, endless and changeless. These epithets seem to apply to the quality, not to the duration of the arhat's existence (for they refer to the time before the death of the body) and to signify that in the state which he has attained death and change have no power over him. He may suffer in body but he does not suffer in mind, for he does not identify himself with the body or its feelings.

Numerous passages could be quoted from the poetical books of the Pali Canon to the effect that nirvana is happiness and the same is stated in the more dogmatic and logical portions. Thus we hear of the bliss of emancipation and of the happiness which is based on the religious life and the words "Nirvana is the greatest happiness" are put into Gotama's own mouth. The middle way preached by him is declared to be free from all distress, and those who walk in it make an end of pain even in this life. In one passage Gotama is found meditating in a wood one winter night and is asked if he feels well and happy. The night is cold, his seat is hard, his clothes are light and the wind bitter. He replies emphatically that he is happy. Those who live in comfortable houses suffer from the evils of lust, hatred and stupidity but he has made an end of those evils and therefore is happy. Thus nirvana is freedom and joy: it is not extinction in the sense we give the word but light to them that sit in darkness, release to those in prison and torture. But though it is legitimately described in terms which imply positive happiness it transcends all human standards of good and evil, pleasure and pain. In describing the progress to it we all—whether Indians or Europeans—necessarily use such words as better, higher, happier, but in truth it is not to be expressed in terms of such values. In an interesting sutta a Jain argues that happiness is the goal of life. But the Buddha states categorically first that perfect happiness is only attainable by abandoning the conscious pursuit of happiness and secondly that even absolute happiness when attained is not the highest goal: there is a better state beyond, and that state is certainly not annihilation or extinction of feeling, for it is described in terms of freedom and knowledge.

The Dhamma-sangani speaks of Nirvana as the Uncompounded Element and as a state not productive of good or evil. Numerous assertions are made about it incidentally but, though we hear that it is perfected and supramundane, most of the epithets are negative and amount to little more than that it transcends, or is absolutely detached from, all human experience. Uncompounded (asankhato) may refer to the passing away of all sankhâras but what may be the meaning of dhâtu or element in this context, I do not presume to conjecture. But whatever else the word may mean, it clearly does not signify annihilation. Both here and in the Questions of Milinda an impression is produced in the mind of the reader, and perhaps was not absent in the mind of the writer, that nirvana is a sphere or plane of existence resembling though excelling

space or ether. It is true that the language when carefully examined proves to be cautious and to exclude material interpretations but clearly the expositor when trying to make plain the inexplicable leaned to that side of error rather than towards annihilation.

Somewhat similar is the language attributed to the Buddha in the Udâna. "There is a state (âyatanam) where there is neither earth nor water, fire nor air, nor infinity either of space or of consciousness, nor nothingness, nor the absence of perception or non-perception, neither this world nor another, neither sun nor moon. That I call neither coming, going, nor standing, neither death nor birth. It is without stability, without movement, without basis: it is the end of sorrow, unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, uncompounded." The statements about nirvana in the Questions of Milinda are definite and interesting. In this work, Nâgasena tells King Milinda that there are two things which are not the result of a cause, to wit space and Nirvana. Nirvana is unproduceable (which does not mean unattainable) without origin, not made of anything and uncompounded. He who orders his life aright passes beyond the transitory, and gains the Real, the highest fruit. And when he has gained that, he has realized Nirvana.

The parts of the Pitakas which seem oldest leave the impression that those who heard and understood the Buddha's teaching at once attained this blissful state, just as the Church regards the disciples of Christ as saints. But already in the Pitakas we find the idea that the struggle to obtain nirvana extends over several births and that there are four routes leading to sanctification. These routes are described by the names of those who use them and are commonly defined in terms of release from the ten fetters binding man to the world. The first is the Sotâpanno, he who has entered into the stream and is on his way to salvation. He has broken the first three fetters called belief in the existence of self, doubt, and trust in ceremonies or good works. He will be born again on earth or in some heaven but not more than seven times before he attains nirvana. He who enters on the next stage is called Sakadâgâmin or coming once, because he will be born once more in this world and in that birth attain nirvana. He has broken the fetters mentioned and also reduced to a minimum the next two, lust and hate. The Anâgâmin, or he who does not return, has freed himself entirely from these five fetters and will not be reborn on earth or any sensuous heaven but in a Brahmâ world once only. The fourth route is that of the Arhat who has completed his release by breaking the bonds called love of life, pride, self-righteousness and ignorance and has made an end of all evil and impurity. He attains nirvana here and is no more subject to rebirth. This simple and direct route is the one contemplated in the older discourses but later doctrine and popular feeling came to regard it as more and more unusual, just as saints grow fewer as the centuries advance further from the Apostolic age. In the dearth of visible Arhats it was consoling to think that nirvana could be won in other worlds.

The nirvana hitherto considered is that attained by a being living in this or some other world. But all states of existence whatever come to an end. When one who has not attained nirvana dies, he is born again. But what happens when an Arhat or a Buddha dies? This question did not fail to arouse interest during the Buddha's lifetime yet in the Pitakas the discussion, though it could not be stifled, is relegated to the background and brought forward only to be put aside as unpractical. The greatest teachers of religion—Christ as well as Buddha—have shown little disposition to speak of what follows on death. For them the centre of gravity is on this side of the grave not on the other: the all important thing is to live a religious life, at the end of which death is met fearlessly as an incident of little moment. The Kingdom of Heaven, of which Christ speaks, begins on earth though it may end elsewhere. In the Gospels we hear something of the second coming of Christ and the Judgment: hardly anything of the place and character of the soul's eternal life. We only gather that a child of God who has done his best need have no apprehension in this or another world. Though expressed in very different phraseology, something like that is the gist of what the Buddha teaches about the dying Saint. But this reticent attitude did not satisfy ancient India any more than it satisfies modern Europe and we have the record of how he was questioned and what he said in reply. Within certain limits that reply is quite definite. The question, does the Tathâgata, that is the Buddha or perfected saint, exist after death, which is the phraseology usually employed by the Pitakas in formulating the problem, belongs to the class of questions called not declared or undetermined, because they

do not admit of either an affirmative or a negative answer. Other problems belonging to this class are: Is the world eternal or not: Is the world infinite or not: Is the soul the same as the body or different from it? It is categorically asserted that none of these questions admit of a reply: thus it is not right to say that (a) the saint exists after death, (b) or that he does not exist, (c) or that he both does and does not exist, (d) or that he neither exists nor does not exist. The Buddha's teaching about these problems is stated with great clearness in a Sutta named after Mâlunkyaputta, an enquirer who visits him and after enumerating them says frankly that he is dissatisfied because the Buddha will not answer them. "If the Lord answers them, I will lead a religious life under him, but if he does not answer them, I will give up religion and return to the world. But if the Lord does not know, then the straightforward thing is to say, I do not know." This is plain speaking, almost discourtesy. The Buddha's reply is equally plain, but unyielding. "Have I said to you, come and be my disciple and I will teach you whether the world is eternal or not, infinite or not: whether the soul is identical with the body, or separate, whether the saint exists after death or not?" "No, Lord." "Now suppose a man were wounded by a poisoned arrow and his friends called in a physician to dress his wound. What if the man were to say, I shall not have my wound treated until I know what was the caste, the family, the dwelling-place, the complexion and stature of the man who wounded me; nor shall I let the arrow be drawn out until I know what is the exact shape of the arrow and bow, and what were the animals and plants which supplied the feathers, leather, shaft and string. The man would never learn all that, because he would die first." "Therefore" is the conclusion, "hold what I have determined as determined and what I have not determined, as not determined."

This sutta may be taken in connection with passages asserting that the Buddha knows more than he tells his disciples. The result seems to be that there are certain questions which the human mind and human language had better leave alone because we are incapable of taking or expressing a view sufficiently large to be correct, but that the Buddha has a more than human knowledge which he does not impart because it is not profitable and overstrains the faculties, just as it is no part of a cure that the patient should make an exhaustive study of his disease.

With reference to the special question of the existence of the saint after death, the story of Yamaka is important. He maintained that a monk in whom evil is destroyed (*khînasavo*) is annihilated when he dies, and does not exist. This was considered a grave heresy and refuted by Sâriputta who argues that even in this life the nature of a saint passes understanding because he is neither all the skandhas taken together nor yet one or more of them.

Yet it would seem that according to the psychology of the Pitakas an ordinary human being is an aggregate of the skandhas and nothing more. When such a being dies and in popular language is born again, the skandhas reconstitute themselves but it is expressly stated that when the saint dies this does not happen. The Chain of Causation says that consciousness and the *sankhâras* are interdependent. If there is no rebirth, it is because (as it would seem) there are in the dying saint no *sankhâras*. His nature cannot be formulated in the same terms as the nature of an ordinary man. It may be noted that karma is not equivalent to the effect produced on the world by a man's words and deeds, for if that were so, no one would have died leaving more karma behind him than the Buddha himself, yet according to Hindu doctrine, whether Buddhist or Brahmanic, no karma attaches to the deeds of a saint. His acts may affect others but there is nothing in them which tends to create a new existence.

In another dialogue the Buddha replies to a wandering monk called Vaccha who questioned him about the undetermined problems and in answer to every solution suggested says that he does not hold that view. Vaccha asks what objection he has to these theories that he has not adopted any of them?

"Vaccha, the theory that the saint exists (or does not exist and so on) after death is a jungle, a desert, a puppet show, a writhing, an entanglement and brings with it sorrow, anger, wrangling and agony. It does not conduce to distaste for the world, to the absence of passion, to the cessation of evil, to peace, to knowledge, to perfect enlightenment, to nirvana. Perceiving this objection, I have not adopted any of these theories." "Then has Gotama any theory of his own?" "Vaccha, the Tathâgata has nothing to do with theories, but this is what he knows: the nature of

form, how form arises, how form perishes: the nature of perception, how it arises and how it perishes (and so on with the other skandhas). Therefore I say that the Tathâgata is emancipated because he has completely and entirely abandoned all imaginations, agitations and false notions about the Ego and anything pertaining to the Ego.” But, asks Vaccha, when one who has attained this emancipation of mind dies where is he reborn? “Vaccha, the word ‘reborn’ does not fit the case.” “Then, Gotama, he is not reborn.” “To say he is not reborn does not fit the case, nor is it any better to say he is both reborn and not reborn or that he is neither reborn nor not reborn.” “Really, Gotama, I am completely bewildered and my faith in you is gone.”

“Never mind your bewilderment. This doctrine is profound and difficult. Suppose there was a fire in front of you. You would see it burning and know that its burning depended on fuel. And if it went out (*nibbâyeyya*) you would know that it had gone out. But if some one were to ask you, to which quarter has it gone, East, West, North or South, what would you say?”

“The expression does not fit the case, Gotama. For the fire depended on fuel and when the fuel is gone it is said to be extinguished, being without nourishment.”

“In just the same way, all form by which one could predicate the existence of the saint is abandoned and uprooted like a fan palm, so that it will never grow up in future. The saint who is released from what is styled form is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom, like the great ocean. It does not fit the case to say either that he is reborn, not reborn, both reborn and not reborn, or neither reborn nor not reborn.” Exactly the same statement is then repeated four times the words sensation, perception, *sankhâras* and consciousness being substituted successively for the word form. Vaccha, we are told, was satisfied.

To appreciate properly the Buddha’s simile we must concentrate our attention on the fire. When we apply this metaphor to annihilation, we usually think of the fuel or receptacle and our mind dwells sadly on the heap of ashes or the extinguished lamp. But what has become of the fire? It is hardly correct to say that it has been destroyed. If a particular fire may be said to be annihilated in the sense that it is impossible to reconstitute it by repeating the same process of burning, the reason is not so much that we cannot get the same flames as that we cannot burn the same fuel twice. But so long as there is continuous combustion in the same fireplace or pile of fuel, we speak of the same fire although neither the flame nor the fuel remains the same. When combustion ceases, the fire goes out in popular language. To what quarter does it go? That question clearly does not “fit the case.” But neither does it fit the case to say that the fire is annihilated.

Nirvana is the cessation of a process not the annihilation of an existence. If I take a walk, nothing is annihilated when the walk comes to an end: a particular form of action has ceased. Strictly speaking the case of a fire is the same: when it goes out a process ceases. For the ordinary man nirvana is annihilation in the sense that it is the absence of all the activities which he considers desirable. But for the arhat (who is the only person able to judge) nirvana after death, as compared with nirvana in life, may be quiescence and suspension of activity, only that such phrases seem to imply that activity is the right and normal condition, quiescence being negative and unnatural, whereas for an arhat these values are reversed.

We may use too the parallel metaphor of water. A wave cannot become an immortal personality. It may have an indefinitely long existence as it moves across the ocean, although both its shape and substance are constantly changing, and when it breaks against an obstacle the resultant motion may form new waves. And if a wave ceases to struggle for individual existence and differentiation from the surrounding sea, it cannot be said to exist any more as a wave. Yet neither the water which was its substance nor the motion which impelled it have been annihilated. It is not even quite correct to say that it has been merged in the sea. A drop of water added to a larger liquid mass is merged. The wave simply ceases to be active and differentiated.

In the *Saṃyutta-Nikâya* the Buddha’s statement that the saint after death is deep and immeasurable like the ocean is expanded by significant illustration of the mathematician’s inability to number the sand or express the sea in terms of liquid measure. It is in fact implied that if we cannot say *he is*, this is only because that word cannot properly be applied to the infinite, innumerable and immeasurable.

The point which is clearest in the Buddha's treatment of this question is that whatever his disciples may have thought, he did not himself consider it of importance for true religion. Speculation on such points may be interesting to the intellect but is not edifying. It is a jungle where the traveller wanders without advancing, and a puppet-show, a vain worldly amusement which wears a false appearance of religion because it is diverting itself with quasi-religious problems. What is the state of the saint after death, is not as people vainly suppose a question parallel to, am I going to heaven or hell, what shall I do to be saved? To those questions the Buddha gives but one answer in terms of human language and human thought, namely, attain to nirvana and arhatship on this side of death, if possible in your present existence; if not now, then in the future good existences which you can fashion for yourself. What lies beyond is impracticable as a goal, unprofitable as a subject of speculation. We shall probably not be transgressing the limits of Gotama's thought if we add that those who are not arhats are bound to approach the question with misconception and it is a necessary part of an Arhat's training to get rid of the idea "I am." The state of a Saint after death cannot be legitimately described in language which suggests that it is a fuller and deeper mode of life. Yet it is clear that nearly all who dispute about it wish to make out that it is a state they could somehow regard with active satisfaction. In technical language they are infected with arûparâgo, or desire for life in a formless world, and this is the seventh of the ten fetters, all of which must be broken before arhatship is attained. I imagine that those modern sects, such as the Zen in Japan, which hold that the deepest mysteries of the faith cannot be communicated in words but somehow grow clear in meditation are not far from the master's teaching, though to the best of my belief no passage has been produced from the Pitakas stating that an arahat has special knowledge about the avyâkatâni or undetermined questions.

Almost all who treat of nirvana after death try to make the Buddha say, is or is not. That is what he refused to do. We still want a plain answer to a plain question and insist that he really means either that the saint is annihilated or enters on an infinite existence. But the true analogues to this question are the other insoluble questions, for instance, is the world infinite or finite in space? This is in form a simple physical problem, yet it is impossible for the mind to conceive either an infinite world or a world stopping abruptly with not even space beyond. A common answer to this antinomy is that the mind is attempting to deal with a subject with which it is incompetent to deal, that the question is wrongly formulated and that every answer to it thus formulated must be wrong. The way of truth lies in first finding the true question. The real difficulty of the Buddha's teaching, though it does not stimulate curiosity so much as the question of life after death, is the nature and being of the saint in this life before death, raised in the argument with Yamaka.

Another reason for not pressing the Buddha's language in either direction is that, if he had wished to preach in the subtlest form either infinite life or annihilation, he would have found minds accustomed to the ideas and a vocabulary ready for his use. If he had wished to indicate any form of absorption into a universal soul, or the acquisition by the individual self of the knowledge that it is identical with the universal self, he could easily have done so. But he studiously avoided saying anything of the kind. He teaches that all existence involves suffering and he preaches escape from it. After that escape the words being and not being no longer apply, and the reason why some people adopt the false idea of annihilation is because they have commenced by adopting the false alternative of either annihilation or an eternal prolongation of this life. A man makes himself miserable because he thinks he has lost something or that there is something which he cannot get. But if he does not think he has lost something or is deprived of something he might have, then he does not feel miserable. Similarly, a man holds the erroneous opinion, "This world is the self, or soul and I shall become it after death and be eternal, and unchanging." Then he hears the preaching of a Buddha and he thinks "I shall be annihilated, I shall not exist any more," and he feels miserable. But if a man does not hold this doctrine that the soul is identical with the universe and will exist eternally...and then hears the preaching of a Buddha it does not occur to him to think that he will be annihilated and he is not miserable. Here the Buddha emphasizes the fact that his teaching is not a variety of

the Brahmanic doctrine about the Âtman. Shortly afterwards in the same sutta he even more emphatically says that he does not teach annihilation. He teaches that the saint is already in this life inconceivable (*ananuvejjo*): “And when I teach and explain this some accuse me falsely and without the smallest ground saying ‘Gotama is an unbeliever; he preaches the annihilation, the destruction, the dying out of real being.’ When they talk like this they accuse me of being what I am not, of saying what I do not say.”

Though the Buddha seems to condemn by anticipation the form of the Vedanta known as the Advaita, this philosophy illustrates the difficulty of making any statement about the saint after his death. For it teaches that the saint knows that there is but one reality, namely Brahman, and that all individual existences are illusion: he is aware that he is Brahman and that he is not differentiated from the world around him. And when he dies, what happens? Metaphors about drops and rivers are not really to the point. It would be more correct to say that nothing at all has happened. His physical life, an illusion which did not exist for himself, has ceased to exist for others.

Perhaps he will be nearest to the Buddha’s train of thought who attempts to consider, by reflection rather than by discussion in words, what is meant by annihilation. By thinking of the mystery of existence and realizing how difficult it is to explain how and why anything exists, we are apt to slip into thinking that it would be quite natural and intelligible if nothing existed or if existing things became nothing. Yet as a matter of fact our minds have no experience of this nothing of which we talk and it is inconceivable. When we try to think of nothingness we really think of space from which we try to remove all content, yet could we create an absolute vacuum within a vessel, the interior of the vessel would not be annihilated. The man who has attained nirvana cannot be adequately defined or grasped even in this life: what binds him to being is cut but it is inappropriate and inadequate to say that he has become nothing.

Charles Eliot. *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*. Vol. 3. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1921.

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