



An Overview of Buddhist Thought

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No God and no Soul.

BUDDHISM is considered by some to be a religion without a God and without a soul. The statement is true and untrue according to what meaning we give to those terms.

Buddhism does not recognise the existence of a being, who stands aloof from his “creations,” and who meddles occasionally with human affairs when his capricious will pleases him. This conception of a supreme being is very offensive to Buddhists. They are unable to perceive any truth in the hypotheses, that a being like ourselves created the universe out of nothing and first peopled it with a pair of sentient beings ; that, owing to a crime committed by them, which, however, could have been avoided if the creator so desired, they were condemned by him to eternal damnation; that the creator in the meantime feeling pity for the cursed, or suffering the bite of remorse for his somewhat rash deed, dispatched his only beloved son to the earth for the purpose of rescuing mankind from universal misery, etc., etc. If Buddhism is called atheism on account of its refusal to take poetry for actual fact, its followers would have no objection to the designation.

Next, if we understand by soul *âtman*, which, secretly hiding itself behind all mental activities, direct them after the fashion of an organist striking different notes as he pleases, Buddhists outspokenly deny the existence of such a fabulous being. To postulate an independent *âtman* outside a combination of the five *Skandhas*¹, of which an individual being is supposed by Buddhists to consist, is to unreservedly welcome egoism with all its pernicious corollaries. And what distinguishes Buddhism most characteristically and emphatically from all other religions is the doctrine of non-*âtman* or non-ego, exactly opposite to the postulate of a soul-substance which is cherished by most of religious enthusiasts. In this sense, Buddhism is undoubtedly a religion without the soul.

To make these points clearer in a general way, let us briefly treat in this chapter of such principal tenets of Buddhism as Karma, *Âtman*, *Avidyâ*, *Nirvâna*, *Dharmakâya*, etc. Some of these doctrines being the common property of the two schools of Buddhism, Hinayanism and Mahayanism, their brief, comprehensive exposition here will furnish our readers with a general notion about the constitution of Buddhism, and will also prepare them to pursue a further specific exposition of the *Mahâyâna* doctrine which follows.

Karma.

One of the most fundamental doctrines established by Buddha is that nothing in this world comes from a single cause, that the existence of a universe is the result of a combination of several causes (*hetu*) and conditions (*pratyaya*), and is at the same time an active force contributing

to the production of an effect in the future. As far as phenomenal existences are concerned, this law of cause and effect holds universally valid. Nothing, even God, can interfere with the course of things thus regulated, materially as well as morally. If a God really exists and has some concern about our worldly affairs, he must first conform himself to the law of causation. Because the principle of karma, which is the Buddhist term for causation morally conceived, holds supreme everywhere and all the time.

The conception of karma plays the most important role in Buddhist ethics. Karma is the formative principle of the universe. It determines the course of events and the destiny of our existence. The reason why we cannot change our present state of things as we may will, is that it has already been determined by the karma that was performed in our previous lives, not only individually but collectively. But, for this same reason, we shall be able to work out our destiny in the future, which is nothing but the resultant of several factors that are working and that are being worked by ourselves in this life.

Therefore, says Buddha:

“By self alone is evil done,
By self is one disgraced;
By self is evil left undone,
By self alone is he purified;
Purity and impurity belong to self:
No one can purify another.”²²

Again,

“Not in the sky
Nor in the midst of the sea,
Nor entering a cleft of the mountains,
Is found that realm on earth
Where one may stand and be
From an evil deed absolved.”²³

This doctrine of karma may be regarded as an application in our ethical realm of the theory of the conservation of energy. Everything done is done once for all; its footprints on the sand of our moral and social evolution are forever left; nay, more than left, they are generative, good or evil, and waiting for further development under favorable conditions. In the physical world, even the slightest possible movement of our limbs cannot but affect the general cosmic motion of the earth, however infinitesimal it be; and if we had a proper instrument, we could surely measure its precise extent of effect. So is it even with our deeds. A deed once performed, together with its subjective motives, can never vanish without leaving some impressions either on the individual consciousness or on the supra-individual, i.e., social consciousness.

We need not further state that the conception of karma in its general aspect is scientifically verified in our moral and material life, where the law of relativity rules supreme, the doctrine of karma must be considered thoroughly valid. And as long as its validity is admitted in this field, we can live our phenomenal life without resorting to the hypothesis of a personal God, as declared by Lamarck when his significant work on evolution was presented to Emperor Napoleon.

But it will do injustice to Buddhism if we designate it agnosticism or naturalism, denying or ignoring the existence of the ultimate, unifying principle, in which all contradictions are

obliterated. Dharmakâya is the name given by Buddhists to this highest principle, viewed not only from the philosophical but also from the religious standpoint. In the Dharmakâya, Buddhists find the ultimate significance of life, which, when seen from its phenomenal aspect, cannot escape the bondage of karma and its irrefragable laws.

Avidyâ.

What claims our attention next, is the problem of nescience, which is one of the most essential features of Buddhism. Buddhists think, nescience (in Sanskrit avidyâ) is the subjective aspect of karma, involving us in a series of rebirths. Rebirth, considered by itself, is no moral evil, but rather a necessary condition of progress toward perfection, if perfection ever be attainable here. It is an evil only when it is the outcome of ignorance, - ignorance as to the true meaning of our earthly existence.

Ignorant are they who do not recognise the evanescence of wordly things and who tenaciously cleave to them as final realities; who madly struggle to shun the misery brought about by their own folly; who savagely cling to the self against the will of God, as Christians would say; who take particulars as final existences and ignore one pervading reality which underlies them all; who build up an adamant wall between the mine and thine: in a word, ignorant are those who do not understand that there is no such thing as an ego-soul, and that all individual existences are unified in the system of Dharmakâya. Buddhism, therefore, most emphatically maintains that to attain the bliss of Nirvana we must radically dispel this illusion, this ignorance, this root of all evil and suffering in this life.

The doctrine of nescience or ignorance is technically expressed in the following formula, which is commonly called the Twelve Nidânas or Pratyayasamutpada, that is to say Chains of Dependence:

(1) There is Ignorance (*avidyâ*) in the beginning; (2) from Ignorance Action (*sanskâra*) comes forth; (3) from Action Consciousness (*vijñâna*) comes forth; (4) from Consciousness Name-and-Form (*nâmarûpa*) comes forth; (5) from Name-and-Form the Six Organs (*sadâyâtana*) come forth; (6) from the Six Organs Touch (*sparça*) comes forth; (7) from Touch Sensation (*vedanâ*) comes forth; (8) from Sensation Desire (*trsnâ*) comes forth; (9) from Desire Clinging (*upâdâna*) comes forth; (10) from Clinging Being (*bhâva*) comes forth; (11) from Being Birth (*jati*) comes forth; and (12) from Birth Pain (*dukkha*) comes forth.

According to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakoça*, the formula is explained as follows: Being ignorant in our previous life as to the significance of our existence, we let loose our desires and act wantonly. Owing to this karma, we are destined in the present life to be endowed with consciousness (*vijñâna*), name-and-form (*nâmarûpa*), the six organs of sense (*sadâyâtana*), and sensation (*vedanâ*). By the exercise of these faculties, we now desire for, hanker after, cling to, these illusive existences which have no ultimate reality whatever. In consequence of this "Will to Live" we potentially accumulate or make up the karma that will lead us to further metempsychosis of birth and death.

The formula is by no means logical, nor is it exhaustive, but the fundamental notion that life started in ignorance or blind will remains veritable.

Non-Atman.

The problem of nescience naturally leads to the doctrine usually known as that of non-Atman, i.e., non-ego, to which allusion was made at the beginning of this chapter. This doctrine of Buddhism is one of the subjects that have caused much criticism by Christian scholars. Its

thesis runs: There is no such thing as ego-soul, which, according to the vulgar interpretation, is the agent of our mental activities. And this is the reason why Buddhism is sometimes called a religion without the soul, as aforesaid.

This Buddhist negation of the ego-soul is perhaps startling to the people, who, having no speculative power, blindly accept the traditional, materialistic view of the soul. They think, they are very spiritual in endorsing the dualism of soul and flesh, and in making the soul something like a corporeal entity, though far more ethereal than an ordinary object of the senses. They think of the soul as being more in the form of an angel, when they teach that it ascends to heaven immediately after its release from the material imprisonment.

They further imagine that the soul, because of its imprisonment in the body, groans in pain for its liberty, not being able to bear its mundane limitations. The immortality of the soul is a continuation after the dismemberment of material elements of this ethereal, astral, ghost-like entity, - very much resembling the Samkhyan *Lingham* or the Vedantic *sûksama-çârîra*. Self-consciousness will not a whit suffer in its continued activity, as it is the essential function of the soul. Brothers and sisters, parents and sons and daughters, wives and husbands, all transfigured and sublimated, will meet again in the celestial abode, and perpetuate their home life much after the manner of their earthly one. People who take this view of the soul and its immortality must feel a great disappointment or even resentment, when they are asked to recognise the Buddhist theory of non-âtman.

The absurdity of ascribing to the soul a sort of astral existence taught by some theosophists is due to the confusion of the name and the object corresponding to it. The soul, or what is tantamount according to the vulgar notion, the ego, is a name given to a certain coordination of mental activities. Abstract names are invented by us to economise our intellectual labors, and of course have no corresponding realities as particular presences in the concrete objective world. Vulgar minds have forgotten the history of the formation of abstract names. Being accustomed always to find certain objective realities or concrete individuals answering to certain names, they - those naive realists - imagine that all names, irrespective of their nature, must have their concrete individual equivalents in the sensual world. Their idealism or spiritualism, so called, is in fact a gross form of materialism, in spite of their unfounded fear for the latter as atheistic and even immoral; - curse of ignorance!

The non-atman theory does not deny that there is a coordination or unification of various mental operations. Buddhism calls this system of coordination vijñâna, not atman. Vijnana is consciousness, while atman is the ego conceived as a concrete entity, - a hypostatic agent which, abiding in the deepest recess of the mind, directs all subjective activities according to its own discretion. This view is radically rejected by Buddhism.

A familiar analogy illustrating the doctrine of non-âtman is the notion of a wheel or that of a house. Wheel is the name given to a combination in a fixed form of the spokes, axle, tire, hub, rim, etc.; house is that given to a combination of roofs, pillars, windows, floors, walls, etc., after a certain model and for a certain purpose. Now, take all these parts independently, and where is the house or the wheel to be found? House or wheel is merely the name designating a certain form in which parts are systematically and definitely disposed. What an absurdity, then, it must be to insist on the independent existence of the wheel or of the house as an agent behind the combination of certain parts thus definitely arranged!

It is wonderful that Buddhism clearly anticipated the outcome of modern psychological researches at the time when all other religious and philosophical systems were eagerly cherishing dogmatic superstitions concerning the nature of the ego. The refusal of modern psychology to have soul mean anything more than the sum-total of all mental experiences, such as sensations, ideas, feelings, decisions, etc., is precisely a rehearsal of the Buddhist doctrine of non-atman.

It does not deny that there is a unity of consciousness, for to deny this is to doubt our everyday experiences, but it refuses to assert that this unity is absolute, unconditioned, and independent. Everything in this phenomenal phase of existence, is a combination of certain causes (*hetu*) and conditions (*pratyaya*) brought together according to the principle of karma; and everything that is compound is finite and subject to dissolution, and, therefore, always limited by something else. Even the soul-life, as far as its phenomenality goes, is no exception to this universal law. To maintain the existence of a soul-substance which is supposed to lie hidden behind the phenomena of consciousness, is not only misleading, but harmful and productive of some morally dangerous conclusions. The supposition that there is something where there is really nothing, makes us cling to this chimerical form, with no other result than subjecting ourselves to an eternal series of sufferings. So we read in the *Lankavatâra Sûtra*, III:

“A flower in the air, or a hare with horns,
Or a pregnant maid of stone:
To take what is not for what is,
‘Tis called a judgment false.

“In a combination of causes,
The vulgar seek the reality of self.
As truth they understand not,
From birth to birth they transmigrate.”

The Non-Atman-ness of Things.

Mahâyânism has gone a step further than Hinayânism in the development of the doctrine of non-âtman, for it expressly disavows, besides the denial of the existence of the ego-substance, a noumenal conception of things, i.e., the conception of particulars as having something absolute in them. Hinayânism, indeed, also disfavors this conception of thing-iness, but it does so only implicitly. It is Mahâyânism that definitely insists on the non-existence of a personal (*puḍgala*) as well as a *thingish* (dharma) ego.

According to the vulgar view, particular existences are real, they have permanent substantial entities, remaining forever as such. They think, therefore, that organic matter remains forever organic just as much as inorganic matter remains inorganic; that, as they are essentially different, there is no mutual transformation between them. The human soul is different from that of the lower animals and sentient beings from non-sentient beings; the difference being well-defined and permanent, there is no bridge over which one can cross to the other. We may call this view naturalistic egoism.

Mahâyânism, against this egoistic conception of the world, extends its theory of non-atman to the realm lying outside us. It maintains that there is no irreducible reality in particular existences, so long as they are combinations of several causes and conditions brought together by the principle of karma. Things are here because they are sustained by karma. As soon as its force is exhausted, the conditions that made their existence possible lose efficiency and dissolve, and in their places will follow other conditions and existences. Therefore, what is organic to-day, may be inorganic to-morrow, and *vice versa*. Carbon, for instance, which is stored within the earth appears in the form of coal or graphite or diamond; but that which exists on its surface is found sometimes combined with other elements in the form of an animal or a vegetable, sometimes in its free elementary state. It is the same carbon everywhere; it becomes inorganic or organic, according to its karma, it has no âtman in itself which directs its transformation

by its own self-determining will. Mutual transformation is everywhere observable; there is a constant shifting of forces, an eternal transmigration of the elements, - all of which tend to show the transitoriness and non-âtman-ness of individual existences. The universe is moving like a whirl-wind, nothing in it proving to be stationary, nothing in it rigidly adhering to its own form of existence.

Suppose, on the other hand, there were an âtman behind every particular being; suppose, too, it were absolute and permanent and self-acting; and this phenomenal world would then come to a standstill, and life be forever gone. For is not changeability the most essential feature and condition of life, and also the strongest evidence for the non-existence of individual things as realities? The physical sciences recognise this universal fact of mutual transformation in its positive aspect and call it the law of the conservation of energy and of matter. Mahâyânism, recognising its negative side, proposes the doctrine of the non-âtman-ness of things, that is to say, the impermanency of all particular existences. Therefore, it is said, "*Sarvam anityam, sarvam çûnyam, sarvam anâtman.*" (All is transitory, all is void, all is without ego.)

Mahâyânists condemn the vulgar view that denies the consubstantiality and reciprocal transformation of all beings, not only because it is scientifically untenable, but mainly because, ethically and religiously considered, it is fraught with extremely dangerous ideas, - ideas which finally may lead a "brother to deliver up the brother to death and the father the child," and, again, it may constrain "the children to rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death." Why? Because this view, born of egoism, would dry up the well of human love and sympathy, and transform us into creatures of bestial selfishness; because this view is not capable of inspiring us with the sense of mutuality and commiseration and of making us disinterestedly feel for our fellow-beings. Then, all fine religious and humane sentiments would depart from our hearts, and we should be nothing less than rigid, lifeless corpses, no pulse beating, no blood running. And how many victims are offered every day on this altar of egoism! They are not necessarily immoral by nature, but blindly led by the false conception of life and the world, they have been rendered incapable of seeing their own spiritual doubles in their neighbors. Being ever controlled by their sensual impulses, they sin against humanity, against nature, and against themselves.

We read in the *Mahâyâna-abhisamaya Sûtra* (Nanjo, no. 196):

"Empty and calm and devoid of ego
Is the nature of all things:
There is no individual being
That in reality exists.

"Nor end nor beginning having
Nor any middle course,
All is a sham, here's no reality whatever:
It is like unto a vision and a dream.

"It is like unto clouds and lightning,
It is like unto gossamer or bubbles floating
It is like unto fiery revolving wheel,
It is like unto water-splashing.

"Because of causes and conditions things are here:
In them there's no self-nature [i.e., âtman]:

All things that move and work,
Know them as such.

“Ignorance and thirsty desire,
The source of birth and death they are:
Right contemplation and discipline by heart,
Desire and ignorance obliterate.

“All beings in the world,
Beyond words they are and expressions:
Their ultimate nature, pure and true,
Is like unto vacuity of space.”⁴

The Dharmakâya.

The Dharmakâya, which literally means “body or system of being,” is, according to the Mahâyânists, the ultimate reality that underlies all particular phenomena; it is that which makes the existence of individuals possible; it is the *raison d'être* of the universe; it is the norm of being, which regulates the course of events and thoughts. The conception of Dharmakâya is peculiarly Mahâyânistic, for the Hînayâna school did not go so far as to formulate the ultimate principle of the universe; its adherents stopped short at a positivistic interpretation of Buddhism. The Dharmakâya remained for them to be the Body of the Law, or the Buddha's personality as embodied in the truth taught by him.

The Dharmakâya may be compared in one sense to the God of Christianity and in another sense to the Brahman or Paramâtman of Vedantism. It is different, however, from the former in that it does not stand transcendently above the universe, which, according to the Christian view, was created by God, but which is, according to Mahâyânism, a manifestation of the Dharmakâya himself. It is also different from Brahman in that it is not absolutely impersonal, nor is it a mere being. The Dharmakâya, on the contrary, is capable of willing and reflecting, or, to use Buddhist phraseology, it is *Karunâ* (love) and *Bodhi* (intelligence), and not the mere state of being.

This pantheistic and at the same time theistic Dharmakâya is working in every sentient being, for sentient beings are nothing but a self-manifestation of the Dharmakâya. Individuals are not isolated existences, as imagined by most people. If isolated, they are nothing, they are so many soap-bubbles which vanish one after another in the vacuity of space. All particular existences acquire their meaning only when they are thought of in their oneness in the Dharmakâya. The veil of Mâyâ, i.e., subjective ignorance may temporarily throw an obstacle to our perceiving the universal light of Dharmakâya, in which we are all one. But when our Bodhi or intellect, which is by the way a reflection of the Dharmakâya in the human mind, is so fully enlightened, we no more build the artificial barrier of egoism before our spiritual eye; the distinction between the *meum* and *teum* is obliterated, no dualism throws the nets of entanglement over us; I recognise myself in you and you recognise yourself in me; *tat tvam asi*. Or,

“What is here, that is there;
What is there, that is here:
Who sees duality here,
From death to death goes he.”⁵

This state of enlightenment may be called the spiritual expansion of the ego, or, negatively, the ideal annihilation of the ego. A never-drying stream of sympathy and love which is the life of religion will now spontaneously flow out of the fountainhead of Dharmakâya.

The doctrine of non-ego teaches us that there is no reality in individual existences, that we do not have any transcendental entity called ego-substance. The doctrine of Dharmakâya, to supplement this, teaches us that we all are one in the System of Being and only as such are immortal. The one shows us the folly of clinging to individual existences and of coveting the immortality of the ego-soul; the other convinces us of the truth that we are saved by living into the unity of Dharmakâya. The doctrine of non-âtrnan liberates us from the shackle of unfounded egoism; but as mere liberation does not mean anything positive and may perchance lead us to asceticism, we apply the energy thus released to the execution of the will of Dharmakâya.

The questions: "Why have we to love our neighbors as ourselves? Why have we to do to others all things whatsoever we would that they should do to us?" are answered thus by Buddhists: "It is because we are all one in the Dharmakâya, because when the clouds of ignorance and egoism are totally dispersed, the light of universal love and intelligence cannot help but shine in all its glory. And, enveloped in this glory, we do not see any enemy, nor neighbor, we are not even conscious of whether we are one in the Dharmakâya. There is no 'my will' here, but only 'thy will,' the will of Dharmakâya, in which we live and move and have our being."

The Apostle Paul says: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Why? Buddhists would answer, "because Adam asserted his egoism in giving himself up to ignorance, (the tree of knowledge is in truth the tree of ignorance, for from it comes the duality of me and thee); while Christ on the contrary surrendered his egoistic assertion to the intelligence of the universal Dharmakâya. That is why we die in the former and are made alive in the latter."

Nirvâna.

The meaning of Nirvana has been variously interpreted by non-Buddhist students from the philological and the historical standpoint; but it matters little what conclusions they have reached, as we are not going to recapitulate them here; nor do they at all affect our presentation of the Buddhists' own view as below. For it is the latter that concerns us here most and constitutes the all-important part of the problem. We have had too much of non-Buddhist speculation on the question at issue. The majority of the critics, while claiming to be fair and impartial, have, by some preconceived ideas, been led to a conclusion, which is not at all acceptable to intelligent Buddhists. Further, the fact has escaped their notice that Pâli literature from which they chiefly derive their information on the subject represents the views of one of the many sects that arose soon after the demise of the Master and were constantly branching off at and after the time of King Açoka. The probability is, that Buddha himself did not have any stereotyped conception of Nirvana, and, as most great minds do, expressed his ideas outright as formed under various circumstances; though of course they could not be in contradiction with his central beliefs, which must have remained the same throughout the course of his religious life. Therefore, to understand a problem in all its apparently contradictory aspects, it is very necessary to grasp at the start the spirit of the author of the problem, and when this is done the rest will be understood comparatively much easier. Non-Buddhist critics lack in this most important qualification; therefore, it is no wonder that Buddhists themselves are always reluctant to accede to their interpretations.

Enough for apology. Nirvâna, according to Buddhists, does not signify an annihilation of

consciousness nor a temporal or permanent suppression of mentation⁶, as imagined by some; but it is the annihilation of the notion of ego-substance and of all the desires that arise from this erroneous conception. But this represents the negative side of the doctrine, and its positive side consists in universal love or sympathy (*karunā*) for all beings.

These two aspects of Nirvāna, i.e., negatively, the destruction of evil passions, and, positively, the practice of sympathy, are complementary to each other; and when we have one we have the other. Because, as soon as the heart is freed from the cangue of egoism, the same heart, hitherto so cold and hard, undergoes a complete change, shows animation, and, joyously escaping from self-imprisonment, finds its freedom in the bosom of Dharmakāya. In this latter sense, Nirvana is the “humanisation” of Dharmakāya, that is to say, “God’s will done in earth as it is in heaven.” If we make use of the terms, subjective and objective. Nirvāna is the former, and the Dharmakāya is the latter, phase of one and the same principle. Again, psychologically, Nirvāna is enlightenment, the actualisation of the Bodhicitta (Heart of Intelligence).

The gospel of love and the doctrine of Nirvāna may appear to some to contradict each other, for they think that the former is the source of energy and activity, while the latter is a lifeless, inhuman, ascetic quietism. But the truth is, love is the emotional aspect and Nirvāna the intellectual aspect of the inmost religious consciousness which constitutes the essence of the Buddhist life.

That Nirvāna is the destruction of selfish desires is plainly shown in this stanza:

“To the giver merit is increased;
When the senses are controlled anger arises not,
The wise forsake evil,
By the destruction of desire, sin, and infatuation,
A man attains to Nirvāna.”⁷

The following which was breathed forth by Buddha against a certain class of monks, testifies that when Nirvana is understood in the sense of quietism or pessimism, he vigorously repudiated it:

“Fearing an endless chain of birth and death,
And the misery of transmigration,
Their heart is filled with worry,
But they desire their safety only.

“Quietly sitting and reckoning the breaths,
They’re bent on the Anāpānam.⁸
They contemplate on the filthiness of the body, -
Thinking how impure it is!

“They shun the dust of the triple world,
And in ascetic practise their safety they seek:
Incapable of love and sympathy are they,
For on Nirvāna abides their thought.”⁹

Against this ascetic practise of some monks, the Buddha sets forth what might be called the ideal of the Buddhist life:

“Arouse thy will, supreme and great,
Practise love and sympathy, give joy and protection;
Thy love like unto space,
Be it without discrimination, without limitation.

Merits establish, not for thy own sake,
But for charity universal;
Save and deliver all beings,
Let them attain the wisdom of the Great Way.”

It is apparent that the ethical application of the doctrine of Nirvâna is naught else than the Golden Rule,¹⁰ so called. The Golden Rule, however, does not give any reason why we should so act, it is a mere command whose authority is ascribed to a certain superhuman being. This does not satisfy an intellectually disposed mind, which refuses to accept anything on mere authority, for it wants to go to the bottom of things and see on what ground they are standing. Buddhism has solved this problem by finding the oneness of things in Dharmakâya, from which flows the eternal stream of love and sympathy. As we have seen before, when the cursed barrier of egoism is broken down, there remains nothing that can prevent us from loving others as ourselves.

Those who wish to see nothing but an utter barrenness of heart after the annihilation of egoism, are much mistaken in their estimation of human nature. For they think its animation comes from selfishness, and that all forms of activity in our life are propelled simply by the desire to preserve self and the race. They, therefore, naturally shrink from the doctrine that teaches that all things worldly are empty, and that there is no such thing as ego-substance whose immortality is so much coveted by most people. But the truth is, the spring of love does not lie in the idea of self, but in its removal. For the human heart, being a reflection of the Dharmakâya which is love and intelligence, recovers its intrinsic power and goodness, only when the veil of ignorance and egoism is cast aside. The animation, energy, strenuousness, which were shown by a self-centered will, and which therefore were utterly despicable, will not surely die out with the removal of their odious atmosphere in which egoism had enveloped them. But they will gain an ever nobler interpretation, ever more elevating and satisfying significance; for they have gone through a baptism of fire, by which the last trace of egoism has been thoroughly consumed. The old evil master is eternally buried, but the willing servants are still here and ever ready to do their service, now more efficiently, for their new legitimate and more authoritative lord.

Destruction is in common parlance closely associated with nothingness, hence Nirvâna, the destruction of egoism, is ordinarily understood as a synonym of nihilism. But the removal of darkness does not bring desolation, but means enlightenment and order and peace. It is the same chamber, all the furniture is left there as it was before. In darkness chaos reigned, goblins walked wild; in enlightenment everything is in its proper place. And did we not state plainly that Nirvâna was enlightenment?

The Intellectual Tendency of Buddhism.

One thing which in this connection I wish to refer to, is what makes Buddhism appear somehow cold and impassive. By this I mean its intellectuality.

The fact is that anything coming from India greatly savors of philosophy. In ancient India everybody of the higher castes seems to have indulged in intellectual and speculative exercises.

Being rich in natural resources and thus the struggle for existence being reduced to a minimum, the Brahmins and the Ksatriyas gathered themselves under most luxuriously growing trees, or retired to the mountain-grottoes undisturbed by the hurly-burly of the world, and there they devoted all their leisure hours to metaphysical speculations and discussions. Buddhism, as a product of these people, is naturally deeply imbued with intellectualism.

Further, in India there was no distinction between religion and philosophy. Every philosophical system was at the same time a religion, and *vice versa*. Philosophy with the Hindus was not an idle display of logical subtlety which generally ends in entangling itself in the meshes of sophistry. Their aim of philosophising was to have an intellectual insight into the significance of existence and the destiny of humanity. They did not believe in anything blindly nor accept anything on mere tradition. Buddha most characteristically echoes this sentiment when he says, "Follow my teachings not as taught by a Buddha, but as being in accord with truth." This spirit of self-reliance and self-salvation later became singularly Buddhist. Even when Buddha was still merely an enthusiastic aspirant for Nirvâna, he seems to have been strongly possessed of this spirit, for he most emphatically declared the following famous passage, in response to the pathetic persuasion of his father's ministers, who wanted him to come home with them: "The doubt whether there exists anything or not, is not to be settled for me by another's words. Arriving at the truth either by mortification or by tranquilisation, I will grasp myself whatever is ascertainable about it. It is not mine to receive a view which is full of conflicts, uncertainties, and contradictions. What enlightened men would go by other's faith? The multitudes are like the blind led in the darkness by the blind."¹¹

To say simply, "Love your enemy," was not satisfactory to the Hindu mind, it wanted to see the reason why. And as soon as the people were convinced intellectually, they went even so far as to defend the faith with their lives. It was not an uncommon event that before a party of Hindu philosophers entered into a discussion they made an agreement that the penalty of defeats should be the sacrifice of the life. They were, above all, a people of intellect, though of course not lacking in religious sentiment.

It is no wonder, then, that Buddha did not make the first proclamation of his message by "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," but by the establishment of the Four Noble Truths.¹² One appeals to the feeling, and the other to the intellect. That which appeals to the intellect naturally seems to be less passionate, but the truth is, feeling without the support of intellect leads to fanaticism and is always ready to yield itself to bigotry and superstition.

The doctrine of Nirvâna is doubtless more intellectual than the Christian gospel of love. It first recognises the wretchedness of human life as is proved by our daily experiences; it then finds its cause in our subjective ignorance as to the true meaning of existence, and in our egocentric desires which, obscuring our spiritual insight, make us tenaciously cling to things chimerical; it then proposes the complete annihilation of egoism, the root of all evil, by which, subjectively, tranquillity of heart is restored, and, objectively, the realisation of universal love becomes possible. Buddhism, thus, proceeds most logically in the development of its doctrine of Nirvâna and universal love.

Says Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*, vol. II): "The reduction of the universe to a single being, the expansion of a single being even to God, this is love." When a man clings to the self and does not want to identify himself with other fellow-selves, he cannot expand his being to God. When he shuts himself in the narrow shell of ego and keeps all the world outside, he cannot reduce the universe to his innermost self. To love, therefore, one must first enter Nirvâna.

The truth is everywhere the same and is attained through the removal of ignorance. But as individual disposition differs according to the previous karma, some are more prone to intellectualism, while the others to sentimentality (in its psychological sense). Let us then

follow our own inclination conscientiously and not speak evil of others. This is called the Doctrine of Middle Path.

NOTES

1 They are: (1) form or materiality (rûpa) (2) sensation (vedanâ), (3) conception (samjñâ), (4) action or deeds (samkâra), and (5) consciousness (vijñâna). These terms are explained elsewhere.

2. *The Dhammapada*, v. 165. Tr. by A. J. Edmunds.

3. *The Dhammapada*, v. 127.

4. This last passage should not be understood in the sense of a total abnegation of existence. It means simply the transcendentality of the highest principle.

5. *The Kathopanisad*, IV. 10.

6. Guyau, a French sociologist, refers to the Buddhist conception of Nirvâna in his *Non-Religion of the Future*. I take his interpretation as typical of those non-Buddhist critics who are very little acquainted with the subject but pretend to know much. (English translation, pp 472-474.)

“Granted the wretchedness of life, the remedy that pessimists propose is the new religious salvation that modern Buddhists are to make fashionable....The conception is that of Nirvana. To sever all the ties which attach you to the external world; to prune away all the young offshoots of desire, and recognise that to be rid of them is a deliverance; to practise a sort of complete psychical circumcision; to recoil upon yourself and to believe that by so doing you enter into the society of the great totality of things (the mystic would say, of God); to create an inner vacuum, and to feel dizzy in the void and, nevertheless, to believe that the void is plenitude supreme, pleroma, these have always constituted temptations to mankind. Mankind has been tempted to meddle with them, as it has been tempted to creep up to the verge of dizzy precipices and look over....Nirvana leads, in fact, to the annihilation of the individual and of the race, and to the logical absurdity that the vanquished are the victors over the trials and miseries of life.”

Then, the author recites the case of one of his acquaintances, who made a practical experiment of Nirvâna, rejecting variety in his diet, giving up meat, wine, every kind of ragout, every form of condiment, and reducing to its lowest possible terms the desire that is most fundamental in every living being - the desire of food, and substituting a certain number of cups of pure milk. “Having thus blunted his sense of taste and the grosser of his appetites, having abandoned all physical activity, he thought to find a recompense in the pleasure of abstract meditation and of esthetic contemplation. He entered to a state which was not that of dreamland, but neither was it that of real life, with its definite details.”

7. *The Udâna*, Ch. VIII, p. 118. Translation by General Strong.

8. This is a peculiarly Indian religious practice, which consists in counting one's exhaling and inhaling breaths. When a man is intensely bent on the practise, he gradually passes to a state of trance, forgetting everything that is going on around and within himself. The practise may have the merit of alleviating nervousness and giving to the mind the bliss of relaxation, but it oftentimes leads the mind to a self-hypnotic state.

9. Here Nirvana is evidently understood to mean self-abnegation or world-flight or quietism, which is not in accord with the true Buddhist interpretation of the term.

10. The sentiment of the Golden Rule is not the monopoly of Christianity; it has been expressed by most of the leaders of thought, thus, for instance: “Requite hatred with virtue” (Lao-tze). “Hate is only appeased by love” (Buddha). “Do not do to others what ye would not have done to you by others” (Confucius). “One must neither return evil, nor do any evil to any

one among men, not even if one has to suffer from them” (Plato, *Crito*, 49).

11. The *Buddhacarita*, Book IX, 63-64.

12. According to one Northern Buddhist tradition, Buddha is recorded to have exclaimed at the time of his supreme spiritual beatitude: “Wonderful! All sentient beings are universally endowed with the intelligence and virtue of the Tathâgata!”

D.T. Suzuki. *Outlines of Mahâyâna Buddhism*. Chapter 1: “A General Characterization of Buddhism.” London: Luxac and Co., 1907.

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