BECAUSE I CARE

BEACHCOMBER

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DO YOU BELIEVE?

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK ME IF I believe in God, and I reply: In order for me to answer your question, you must first tell me what you mean by the word *God*. If they then say, as they often do, that God is the 'Creator,' who made everything, then I say that I don't believe, for the simple reason that everything was *not* created, as is plain to see. There is evolution, revolution, and devolution; in other words: everything changes and becomes other than it is. It is the old thing about the chicken and the egg that even children know: which came first?

A first cause of things, said the Buddha, cannot be perceived, casting doubt on all the theories and belief-systems that are centered around this. Years ago, in Nepal, I saw fossils of sea-shells in the Himalayas, showing that what is now the highest mountain-range on Earth was once on the sea-bed. Geology has shown that, because of the movement of the tectonic-plates of the Earth's crust, the Indian subcontinent—which was once an island-continent—was pushed northward against the Asian land-mass, and the sea-bed between squeezed and forced up to become the mighty mountain-peaks of the Himalayas. This took place many millions of years ago, when there was no-one around to observe or record it, of course, but the incontrovertible evidence is there, nevertheless. Yet so convinced are the believers in 'creationism' that their ideas are correct, that they are even prepared to claim that, if God could create everything else, then he is easily able to create fossils, too. And why should he create fossils, we may ask? Why, to confuse the unbelievers and harden their hearts, of course!

Nowadays, most of us know about erosion, how, by the ceaseless action of the elements—rain, wind, water, snow, ice, sunshine—rock and earth is slowly worn away, so that not even mountains last forever, but get washed back to the seas from whence they arose long ago—from mountain to sea, from sea to mountain, ad infinitum, in a cyclic proc-

ess: arising and falling. Geology tells us, too, that our planet was not always a planet, spinning around the sun, but came into being from gasses and debris swirling around in Space—perhaps the remains of an exploded star or stars; nothing comes from nothing, nothing goes to nothing. Over billions of what we call 'years,' this cloud of hot debris coalesced, cooled, and 'became' our planet. Obviously, it was not created, but gradually came into being and evolved, as we can assume all the other planets, stars, galaxies and nebulae of the universe did. And, just as our planet came into being and evolved, so will it devolve and pass out of being, its component parts and particles scattering, to be absorbed into other things. We cannot talk—or even think—of a beginning or an end to all this.

And so the process goes on. A moment in Time, as the believers say, when some 'God,' Impulse or Force, decided to create the Universe and everything in it, is inconceivable. Most scientists now—though they may change their minds later, as they have done before—subscribe to the *Big-Bang Theory*, by which they say the Universe evolved from a cosmic explosion 15 billion years ago. The substance from which it all came—although they can't say where *that* came from—they call 'anti-matter,' which they claim is so dense and heavy that a teaspoonful of it would weigh more than our entire planet! Needless to say, none of them have ever seen or handled anti-matter, and maybe this is just another idea. But even if it isn't, it is still not new; the sages of India thought of it many centuries ago, and went further than Western science has gone by saying it is recurrent—that is, it has happened not just once, as Western scientists say, and that before which there was nothing—but countless times. The Universe explodes outwards, lasts an incalculable period, passing through many phases, and then implodes or collapses in upon itself. Hindus call this *'the breathing-out and breathing-in of Brahma.'* When Brahma —their Supreme God—breathes out, the Universe comes into being; as Brahma breathes in, the Universe collapses.

The time between the out-breath and the in-breath, and the in-breath and the out-breath, mark the periods when the Universe exists and does not exist. So, Western science has discovered, or conceived of, something that was already thought of long ago, and still has far to go.

Some people think that, without belief in God there is no basis for morality, and we cannot possibly be religious. But such thinking reveals the poverty and narrowness of their minds. Why should it be that we cannot be moral or religious if we do not believe in God? Does morality or religion really depend upon that? To think so shows that we do not have a firm basis within ourselves—which is where it must all come from—but are dependent on outside support for it. There are many *Godists* who are far from being moral, while many atheists live by a much-firmer code of morality than they; on the other hand, though, to be fair, there *are* believers who really do live religiously, and non-believers who do not. My point here, however, is that belief is not an indispensable part of religion; it can be better replaced with conviction born of knowledge, which means *faith*; religion would thereby have a firmer foundation.

Now, the Universe does seem to be orderly rather than chaotic; no-one can deny this. But its order has come about through chaos over inconceivably-vast periods of time; it wasn't always this way. To ascribe its order to the controlling hand of an anthropomorphic deity, however—that is, a God or Being with human qualities like us—who might be petitioned, bribed and persuaded into changing its mind, answering prayers, granting favors, meting out rewards and punishments, taking sides, etc.—is an assumption of omniscience on our part, which is a great mistake, of course, and puts us in a position where it is very difficult to learn more about what is presently beyond us, without first retreating from our unwarranted assumptions. The best and honest thing to do would be to admit, humbly and sincerely, that we do not know, rather than fill the vacuum with myths and conjecture. We will not immediately die or dis-

appear if we frankly and fearlessly admit what is true—that we really do not know—and will then be able to proceed again, fresh and unencumbered.

If people want to believe the Universe was created (and there are still people who believe it was created just six-thousand years ago, and that 'Adam and Eve' were placed on this Earth to become the first ancestors of the entire human race, with all its various colors and shades), that is up to them, of course; we are all—or should be—entitled to our own opinions, and because I hold to this principle, I dare to write my books. But it would be better to investigate, find out, discover, and know, and thereby leave behind the conflicting and tangled mass of beliefs and opinions.

At this point, while we are on the subject of Space, and much is being said and reported about UFO's, I want to say that when open contact is made with extra-terrestrial life-forms, let us hope they aren't hostile and aggressive, as humans often have been and are. (I say 'open' here because secret or clandestine contact has probably already been made). They will likely be more intelligent than us, to have got to us before we got to them, so let's not assume that in this vast cosmos, the tiny planet we inhabit is the only one that can support intelligent life. Actually, it would be of immense importance, and very instructive for us to be visited by beings from other worlds, for it would provide us with a basis for comparison—us and them—and hopefully help us understand ourselves as human-beings, regardless of the difference in skin-color.

The impact that meeting extra-terrestrials would have on religion would be tremendous, too, and would force us to evaluate and update our concepts and beliefs. Religions based on so-called 'revelation,' claiming direct and exclusive access to 'God,' and which segregate humanity into the 'faithful and the infidels,' the 'saved and the damned,' the 'chosen and the forsaken,' etc, would have to rethink their dogmas (or maybe try to convert the ET's to their be-

liefs? I have no doubt that some would be sufficiently naïve and arrogant to try). Something would stand but much would fall under the light of new facts; evolution is like this.

It is hard to imagine now—we who live in a secular age—what a tremendous psychological shock and blow to its faith Europe underwent in the 16th century when the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo revealed that the Earth turns around the Sun, and not—as the Church had always taught and maintained—that the Earth is the center of the Universe, around which all else turns, and for the inhabitants of which, the 'only begotten Son of God' had given his life in atonement for their sins. Until then, Europeans, in their ignorance, had felt secure and confident of their cosmic importance and superiority, but the heliocentric—*sun-centered*—theory changed all this, causing many to doubt their faith, and feel infinitesimally small. They must have had to make an enormous adjustment. And contact with extra-terrestrial life, when it is made, will necessitate drastic adjustment and change to the way we think and live. Life will never be the same for us after that.

Great care must be taken, however, when we begin an inquiry into whether or not there is such a thing as Truth, or if it is just a product or projection of our wishful thinking, lest, starting with a belief, we thereafter try to make everything conform to it—snipping corners off here, shaving bits off there, adding, embellishing, bending, twisting, squeezing and distorting things to make them fit our preconceptions. For this reason, believers can never find Truth—supposing that Truth is something objective—for their minds are already made up from the start and thereby unable to see. Meanwhile, until we really do know, do we need to think, worry or speculate about how or when or if the Universe began? Have we nothing better to do with our limited time than that?

A REDEFINITION

THE WIDESPREAD SCEPTICISM towards religion today is neither new nor surprising, but something of perennial recurrence. Nor should it be regarded as something negative, as there are understandable reasons for it. But it's sad that, while the opportunities exist for most of us to investigate various systems of thought that our ancestors had little or no access to, and construct a workable philosophy of life therefrom, many of us take no advantage of such opportunities. We prefer to remain ignorant, living like frogs in a well, thinking that our narrow and restricted views of the world are all that there is to be seen.

Like great numbers of people today, many of the ancient Romans were skeptical about religion, but saw it as a political expedient. At the same time, they were quite superstitious, and were still bound to supernatural-based religion. Eclectic by temperament, and not much caring which gods people worshipped, they adopted and incorporated the gods of conquered peoples into their pantheon, and used them for controlling the populace; the gods thus became guardians of the state, or spirit-police, and relieved the pressure on the armed legions in controlling and administering the empire. Although the practice of religion was often just a matter of empty formalism—then as now—it was sometimes considered a crime to be irreligious, as that could have a destabilizing effect on society, and such a thing, to the orderly Romans, was to be avoided at all costs; it is rather like the Constitution of Indonesia, which states that every citizen *must* have a religion and believe in God, because a person who doesn't believe in God is an atheist, and atheism, in Indonesia, is/was synonymous with Communism, not realizing that Communism, to its devotees, is/was also a religion.

Nowadays, though many of us still claim to be religious and believe in this or that, our religiosity, in many cases, doesn't run very deep or have much of a foundation in fact,

so has no transforming effect upon our baser instincts, nor does it displace superstition. Many of us regard religion as something of a joke, an anachronism, or as something to be ashamed of, so it is not rare to hear people openly say they have no religion, though whether they really understand what they are saying or not is another matter; many of us speak without thinking much first, or repeat what others say, like parrots, just as we copy others in fashion.

There is a great need to redefine religion in terms of the way we live today, for religion—like society—exists for the individual, not the other way around; it is, or should be, a thing we can make use of, not something that crushes us or forces us into 'jelly-moulds' of undifferentiated conformity.

While many people have abandoned religion completely, and are 'at sea' without rudder or direction in life, some are still religious at heart, in the sense of living by principles that are important to them. We must try to strip away the accretions and externalities, and help people find the essence of religion; the names and forms are not important, as long as we can understand and live by the essence. Even so, some people would ask: "But why should we bother with even the essence?" And I would say: Because we live together with others, and, to live harmoniously, we must understand certain things about living communally; if we do not, cannot, or will not accept the responsibilities of communal life, then we cannot reasonably expect the rights and privileges of such living, either, but should leave the community, and go to live elsewhere. The rights are accompanied by the responsibilities, and we cannot expect to enjoy one without accepting the other; this is something we must face honestly.

Not long ago, I heard someone ask another man a rather common question: "Are you religious?" He replied: "Well, I used to be; I used to be a Catholic." This reply was rather revealing; it implied that unless one goes under a particular brand-name like 'Christian,' 'Buddhist,' 'Hindu,' 'Muslim,' etc., one cannot be considered religious, nor consider oneself so. But this is absurd, and in stating so, I want to try to convey a

much broader and truer meaning of what it means to be religious that might cause some people to say: “Well, in that case, I suppose I *am* religious after all!”

Not bothering to investigate or question, many of us have fallen under the tyranny of words, living only superficially, accepting things on others’ authority, thinking that, just because we know the words, we thereby know the things the words represent. Why are we so easily satisfied and anaesthetized? In spite of our education—actually, in my opinion, it is *because* of it—we have become dull and mediocre; maybe this is because, being state-operated, and available to almost everyone—*easily* available—with no need to strive or search for it, education has lost its intrinsic value, and rather than being seen as a way to overcome ignorance and enlighten us, is looked upon merely as a means to enable us to earn a living later on, and little else; thus, it keeps us within the realm of ignorance, rather than liberating us therefrom. Moreover, education is largely in the hands of people who teach from their pockets instead of from their hearts, and who are therefore just as much victims as those they teach. And so we get only a partial education; because of the overwhelming emphasis on academic success, so much is neglected or regarded as unimportant, such as an overall sense of values, and we end up getting half-baked. The education-systems of the world are, for the most part, sad failures, if we look at their end results. But, if we cannot change them immediately—and we cannot, of course—we must beware, so that their negative influence on us and our children can be minimized. It means that we must think, and right now, many of us do not think, as we have not been taught *how* to think; we’ve only been taught *what* to think, and have been restricted by curricula. But must we remain forever in this state? Not unless we wish to; there are alternatives.

What I mean is that we shouldn’t just commit ourselves or our children into the hands of others to be ‘educated,’ but should realize that our education depends largely upon how

we go about learning. Instead of just accepting whatever information is pumped into us, like petrol into a car, we should be aware of what's going on, so that we remain in control of ourselves, and do not succumb to the pressure to conform to the standards of others. It doesn't mean that we should drop out and abandon our academic education, but that we should read between the lines, and be at least one step ahead of the education-system.

We have more knowledge now than people have ever had before, but must realize that there is danger in having so much knowledge, for the more knowledge we accumulate, the more 'out on a limb' we get. Why is there danger? Anyone who needs to ask this question is in greater danger than those who don't. Knowledge, as Francis Bacon said long ago, is Power, and we must know how to use it properly, otherwise it can cause a great deal of damage. For many years now, we've had the unprecedented knowledge and power, through the splitting of the atom, to destroy the planet, and it is indeed a wonder that we haven't yet done so; we have come near to it several times. Previously, our capacity to create havoc was limited.

Now, most people do not like being told what to do, and many of us resent it; this is quite normal. Some people even take a perverse delight in breaking laws just to feel good, and not because they really disagree with the laws.

Lawlessness increases because people refuse to replace the restraint of external authority with self-restraint, but just do whatever they feel like doing; they consider this freedom, when in reality, it is *abuse* of freedom, and in the end will only hurt themselves; the really sad thing about it, though, is that before it hurts themselves, their lack of restraint causes a lot of trouble and grief to others. When we live together with others, we cannot—or rather, *should not*—do just whatever we like, but must recognize the limits and the need for restraint; and to restrain oneself out of consideration for others does not mean weakness, as some people appear to think, but strength.

Tell people what to do and what not to do, and something inside them wants to resist, just to prove that "*I* don't need or want anyone to tell me what to do!" This attitude is really something to be understood, so that we may try a different approach in getting people to live responsibly.

Not long ago, while staying with my sister in England, someone came to visit her, bringing along her little boy. This child, not getting his own way over something or other, threw a tantrum and started to cry. His mother and others told him to stop crying, but it had no effect, so I said to him: "Cry louder! Cry some more! Don't stop!" whereupon he stopped crying. Perhaps this is the meaning of the old Jewish-Christian myth of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: God had placed them in this beautiful garden and provided them with all kinds of fruit-bearing trees, so that all they needed to do was pick and eat. But there was one tree that he forbade them to eat the fruit of, and that was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Being forbidden to eat that fruit, however, that was the very fruit they wanted to eat most, in spite of the fact that they had so many other kinds of fruit; so, finally, they incurred God's wrath by eating the forbidden fruit. But was God so ignorant of the psychology of the humans he had created that he could not foresee this? Maybe he should have eaten some of that fruit himself, instead of getting mad with Adam and Eve and expelling them from the Garden into the wilderness; it really wasn't very understanding or skillful of him, unless that is what he intended to happen. Tell people to do a thing, and they don't want to do it; tell them not to do it, and they want to do it. Must we, therefore, tell them to do something when we don't want them to do it, and not to do a thing when we want them to do it? Sometimes, we have to confuse and trick people into thinking clearly for themselves and doing the right thing. Morality, or responsible living, must come from within us, rather than without, must be something that we choose to do rather than being forced or cajoled to do it; it must be first-hand and direct rather than second hand; it must be *ours* rather than someone else's. If

we are intelligent and responsible, we will not need anyone to tell us what to do or what not to do, but will do it ourselves simply because we know it should or should not be done; we will not need someone standing behind us with a gun, threatening punishment if we disobey or promising rewards for doing what we are told.

If we are given knowledge—and as said before, it is given to all-and-sundry, haphazardly—there is a great risk that it will be misused; the old cliché: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing", is not only true, but is much more true of much knowledge! Do our educators ever warn us of the dangers and liabilities of knowledge? Are we always shown how to use it properly? Or are the educators—as I suspect most of them to be—ignorant of the dangers themselves, merely passing on their dangerous information to others? How shall the blind lead the blind, without both falling into the ditch? By doling out knowledge to all-comers as we do, we are producing *walking time-bombs* (even if it's only in a small proportion of cases). We must be prepared to *receive* knowledge—must be educated to be educated—and not just have it thrust upon us; there must be some kind of initiation, some screening, some probation, otherwise, what should be a boon may easily become a curse.

Not many of us are aware of how we ride upon the backs of other people throughout our entire lives, and so, maybe there is an excuse—though it's a very poor excuse, and nothing to be proud of—for our ingratitude: Ignorance. The present is like the snow-cap on a mountain-peak: it rests on the past, on all that was before it. Behind and beneath us lie all the great thinkers, sages, scientists, statesmen, artists, musicians, philosophers, inventors, discoverers, explorers, and heroes (we will disregard the overwhelming numbers of foolish people, rogues, tyrants, villains that were there too, though we cannot dismiss them entirely; they also had their parts to play). Countless millions of our ancestors lived, struggled, suffered, sacrificed and died in order to contribute their ideas, labors, inventions and discoveries to posterity, so

that people who they never dreamed about, like you and I, could inherit and benefit from them. But many of us take this incalculable wealth for granted, thinking that all we need to do is stretch out a hand and pick it, like ripe fruit on a tree; seldom do we think about what is involved in the things we use; we are so thoughtless and ungrateful. This is a tragedy, and will surely cause us harm, for it is not *our* knowledge, born of our own struggles and experiences, but is second-, third-, or multi-hand. We must beware, and not treat it lightly, as it is a double-edged sword.

It is true that we have vast knowledge; it has been thrust upon us. But we are deficient in Wisdom, and this is why it is so easy to misuse and abuse our knowledge, or not to use it to its full extent. Indeed, without wisdom to guide it, we would be better off without most of our knowledge, as it can be so destructive. It has been said that "Knowledge maketh man". Yes, but what kind of man? It gives us greater capacity than those without knowledge, but how we use this increased capacity depends largely upon character. Take this, as an example: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there have already been several cases of people caught trying to sell weapons'-grade plutonium on the black-market, to anyone who has money enough to pay and who wants it—and they were asking only nominal sums! So far, we have heard only of those who were caught, not of those who were not. And we shall probably see more of this kind of thing as we go on; this is only the beginning. It is feared that nuclear-scientists and bio-technologists, thrown out of work by 'peace,' may sell their expertise—their knowledge—to anyone who will pay—and there are plenty of other madmen in the world besides Saddam Hussein! The Cold War is behind us, but the very thought of this new threat is terrifying, for the super-powers at least had a good reason for maintaining a par with each other, and restraining themselves, from fear of mutual destruction. We are still a long way from feeling secure. For personal gain, some people are prepared to jeop-

ardize the whole world—not realizing that they are included. Knowledge they might have; wisdom they do not.

How, then, might we acquire the wisdom to enable us to control and use our knowledge non-dangerously? By understanding ourselves in relation to other people and things, by opening our hearts and minds, by seeing things in perspective. If we no longer thought in an isolated, narrow and distorted way about ourselves, we would not rapaciously exploit things as we now tend to do, taking just whatever we can get in our unquenchable fear and greed, but, out of gratitude and responsibility, we would be more concerned about what we can put back, what we can contribute to our world. In other words: Love the place you're in, regardless of the fact that you might have been born elsewhere; we had no choice about where we were born, but we can decide how we are going to live. It is our world—the only one we have. It's a pity to waste it in the hope that the 'hereafter' will be better; nobody knows about the hereafter; maybe it exists only in our imagination.

Now, although wisdom cannot be transmitted, in the sense that we cannot force anyone to understand if they are not ready to or don't want to, it is possible to make it available, to nurture it, to provide a much more complete education than is presently provided, to impart to our children a sense of the interconnectedness of things, and the sanctity of life, to demonstrate the cause-and-effect nature of our relationships with other people and things, so that they might develop a more humane, realistic and complete vision of how to live in the world.

If we can—as we do—teach children to be selfish, ambitious, greedy, competitive, acquisitive, arrogant and thoughtless towards others—if not by our words, then by the example of our behavior—it should also be possible to instill in them some of the finer human qualities, even though it might not be so easy. This used to be considered the function of religion, but why should it be excluded from secular education when it is so important? It should be an integral

part of an all-round education. And such an education, by leading us to understand that each of us is a vital member of the world, and has a role to play in it, will also help us discover what it means to be religious. It is not a matter of belief or acceptance of a particular creed, but of seeing how things are, and such seeing might bring about a much-needed transformation. The role of the educator, therefore, is one of tremendous importance, in that it facilitates self-realization.

Do not be content with dictionary definitions, nor with the definitions of other people, but strive to come to a direct understanding of things by yourself; it is essential to do so.

TELESCOPIC VISION

SOMEONE ONCE TOLD me he considered Buddhism pessimistic and unscientific because it focuses on suffering; he didn't agree with the idea that 'Life is Suffering.' This is a common misconception. I replied that the Buddha never said there was no happiness in life because of course, there is, as we can all see; if there were no happiness, we might as well all give up in despair and commit suicide now, rather than go on suffering. The Buddha said: *Nibbanam paramam sukham,* meaning: Nirvana is the highest bliss. 'Highest'—*paramam*—implies other forms of happiness beneath it, or lesser than it. The happiness that most of us know, however, is imperfect or incomplete as it changes and becomes otherwise; it therefore holds within itself the seeds of suffering. When we are happy, we try to grasp, prolong and perpetuate it, so that it won't end; we want it to go on and on. But this is futile, and only wears us out; the very effort to grasp it results in frustration and disappointment.

Understanding that happiness is impermanent, like all else, we will not be so sad when it changes and becomes otherwise, for will know this is the nature of things, and that whatever it has changed into will also change.

Indisputably, life involves pain, and can never be separated from it; all living things feel pain. However, there are different ways of looking at and experiencing pain. A baby feels pain, of various kinds, but is unable to reason about it; it has no way of knowing whether or not it is the norm, and so perhaps accepts it—though not without some crying and other reactions—as just the way things are; it cannot speak and say: "I've got pain here," or "I'm sore there."

As we grow older, however, we soon realize that pain is not constant, and that there are periods of no-pain, so we have something to compare pain with. Naturally, we prefer to be without it, as it is unpleasant, and if we could choose to be without it, we surely would. But pain does not respect

our wishes and comes to us, unannounced and unwanted. We usually view this unwelcome visitor with fear and hatred, and this not only prevents clear seeing, but also increases the pain, because we set our reason—which is faulty and incomplete—against it, and complain, saying: "Why me? What did I do to deserve this? It's not fair!" We have never learned to look at pain except subjectively, and so our pain is distorted and magnified out of all proportion.

Some animals behave instinctively to pain, seeking out herbs and roots that might alleviate it, or ceasing to eat as a remedy, thus giving the body chance to heal itself, but only man has developed a medical science. Because we refused to reconcile ourselves to pain and pitted ourselves against it, we developed a medical science. Yet still we suffer. Even common ailments like toothache, rheumatism or colds cause us anguish. Our bodies are battlefields, and we live in conflict, in fear of pain.

Because of the advances of medical science, many people live with a dream that, eventually, we shall be able to live totally without pain and sickness; but this is unrealistic and unwise, and only causes more suffering.

If *only* we would drop the vain hope that life can somehow be pain-free. If *only* we would realize that it is natural for the body to age, sicken and die, we would not be so surprised when it happens to us. Nor would it prevent us from striving to overcome and lessen pain; in fact, it would better enable us to do so, for we would view pain with wisdom instead of with fear and hatred.

When we look through a telescope, we see things bigger than with the naked eye. But there is not just *one* way of looking through a telescope. We can, if we wish, turn the telescope around and look through the large end so that everything appears smaller. If we view pain with fear, it is like looking through the small end of the telescope: it becomes magnified; but if we look at pain with wisdom, it is like looking through the large end: it diminishes.

Some years ago, I came down with pneumonia, and had quite a rough time; but I didn't let it interrupt my speaking-appointments. I wished to give one last talk, before leaving Malaysia, to a group of people who had been kind to me. Aware of my condition, however, some tried to persuade me to rest and not talk. I told them not to feel sorry for me because I was sick, but to be attentive to what I would say, as I would be speaking from the *center of the storm*, from direct experience, with authority, and not from mere theory. I said that I didn't feel sad because my body was sick, and therefore was not suffering, and actually, they should feel happy for me, as I was lucky. *Lucky? How come?* Lucky because it was the worst sickness I had ever had, but instead of feeling sad about, I used it to compare and measure how fortunate I'd been to remain healthy and free from serious sickness for so long until then; that sickness reminded me about this and about how everything is impermanent. The Dharma enabled me to turn it around.

We probably all have ailments of some sort, things that cause us to complain and wish we didn't have, but if we were to make a list of all our aches, pains, sicknesses and diseases, it would probably not take longer than one or two minutes. If we were to make another list, however, of all the things we might suffer from but don't, it would probably take us many hours. To then compare the two lists might help us understand that we are really very fortunate.

You have been born, so accept the woes of birth instead of living in conflict with them. How shall life be for you other than impermanent, ultimately unsatisfactory, and not-yours? Work with what you have; make something positive of it, and give up your ranting and raving at things that do not and will not conform to your desires. Life provides us with ample opportunity not only for self-development, but also to improve the world.

DO *ALL* ROADS LEAD TO ROME?

MANY OF US ARE FOND OF using clichés and proverbs without really understanding their meanings. One such is "All roads lead to Rome", and is often used to show how eclectic and open people are regarding religion. In fact, all that they succeed in doing is demonstrating their ignorance, for unless a person has practiced all religions, as far as they can take him, and has verified, by his own experience, that all religions *do*, in fact, lead to the same end, to say such a thing has no meaning at all. And, short of practicing all religions to their ultimate ends—or even just one of them—a little intelligent and objective investigation of the theories of the various religions would reveal that the aims are not the same, and in some cases, differ considerably.

Most religions are centered around the idea of 'God', which is a term open to interpretation, and many wars have been fought, much persecution perpetrated, much hatred and fanaticism generated from differing interpretations of it! Most believers in God say there is only one God—*their* God, of course—but there is an inherent contradiction in this that shows that they *do* believe in 'other Gods,' or they could not say *our* God is the *only* God,' as '*ours* implies '*yours.'* If there were really only one God there would be no need to talk about it as such.

The ultimate aim of theistic religions—that is, Creator-God-centered—is Heaven, but this is a postulated place that can only be attained after death, as it is remote and different from the one we presently live in; we can't go to Heaven with our physical bodies, but must die first, and then one's soul, spirit, or consciousness—call it what you will; one name is as good as another for something so intangible—may go there; the body stays behind, to be burnt, buried, or otherwise disposed of.

The Non-Theistic religions, on the other hand—and the three main ones generally considered such, when they are considered religions at all, are Buddhism, Confucianism

and Taoism—teach that the highest reality can be attained anytime and anywhere, and not just after the body's death; Reality has no limits, and if it is to be found only after the body's death, and not in this life, it cannot be Reality. They also teach that Heaven, as a place—and if there *is* such a place—is impermanent and therefore cannot be the Ultimate. Also, unlike Theistic religions, they do not depend upon belief, but emphasize direct, personal experience.

Now, apart from the differences between the various religions, there are differences between the numerous sects of the *same* religions, and Christianity is the most outstanding in this respect. A well-known Christian magazine, *The Plain Truth (April 1991 issue)*, stated that Christianity is divided into more than 25,000 sects, cults and denominations, and that this figure appears to be increasing by about five every week! Undoubtedly, each and every one of these sects and sub-sects considers itself to be right and divinely-appointed—and in many cases, to be the *only* right one—or else there would be no reason for its existence.

Buddhism, too, is divided into sects and cults, though far fewer than its younger brother, Christianity. Unlike Christianity, however, Buddhism has no record at all of persecution of dissidents or 'heretics'; it allows everyone freedom to go his own way, to seek Truth in his own manner and at his own pace; excommunication or condemnation to Hell forever is something unknown in Buddhism. It is said that we are punished *by* our sins rather than *for* them.

As in all other religions, there is fanaticism and sectarianism among Buddhists, too; Buddhism can't claim to be free from this human failing. But there is less excuse for it in Buddhism, for it teaches, from the start, that we should keep our minds open, and investigate things clearly and thoroughly, instead of just believing and accepting the words of others unquestioningly. However, such freedom is seldom valued and used, and many Buddhists fall into the common habit of looking at things from just their own particular viewpoint, forgetting, or not knowing, that there are

other ways of looking at the same things. Life is not two-dimensional, like a photograph, but has depth—and *time*, too, in which things change—so the more angles we can look at a thing from, the clearer the picture we will get of it, and we will be less inclined to cling onto and defend our own viewpoint, saying, "*I* am right, and *you* are wrong." If we wear blinkers, like a horse, and are thereby restricted in the way we see the world, there is no-one to blame but ourselves, and we cannot reasonably complain that there is nothing to be seen except whatever is right in front of us.

Now, when Prince Siddhartha left his palace to go into the forest in search of Truth, he went first to the hermitage of a famous spiritual teacher named *Alara Kalama*, who readily accepted him as a student. Siddhartha was so keen to learn, so humble and intelligent, that he soon mastered all Alara Kalama taught him, at which the teacher was overjoyed, and calling all the other disciples together, said to Siddhartha: "What I know, you know; what you know, I know," meaning that there was no difference between them in spiritual knowledge and attainment; "Come, Siddhartha, and share the leadership of my disciples with me."

But Siddhartha, though grateful to Alara Kalama for his nobleness and selflessness of spirit, was not satisfied, as he still had not found the Truth about Suffering, for which he had left his home and gone forth. And so, sincerely thanking Alara Kalama for his generosity, he left and went in search of another teacher who would lead him to higher things, and hopefully, to the Way out of *Dukkha*.

It wasn't long before he came to the hermitage of *Udrakka Ramaputra*, another famous teacher, and without hesitation was accepted as a disciple. Expecting no special treatment because of his royal blood, but depending solely on his own effort and initiative, here, too, he soon mastered all he was taught. And here, too, the teacher was so devoid of pride and attachment, that he was delighted to have met someone who so easily and quickly understood his teachings, when no-one else had come near to it even after be-

ing with him for years, and, far from feeling his position and fame threatened thereby, eagerly acknowledged Siddhartha as an equal. "What I know, you know; what you know, I know. Come Siddhartha, and take over the leadership of my disciples, while I retire." What loveliness of spirit! Here was this widely-known and respected teacher, much older than Siddhartha, prepared to step down, joyfully and willingly, and let another take his place! Where, among the teachers and leaders of religion today, can we find such nobility and absence of pride?

But again, though Siddhartha respected the greatness of heart and generosity of Udrakka Ramaputra so much, he felt obliged to decline his offer, as he had still not found what he had set out to find. Thanking the teacher respectfully, he departed, and went on alone, as before.

Soon afterwards, he began the ascetic practices common among yogis, hoping that, by torturing his body in various ways, he could free his spirit from its shackles and thereby find Enlightenment. But although he carried these practices to terrible extremes—sitting surrounded by fire under the blazing summer sun, squatting immersed in icy water in the winter, controlling and holding his breath until he felt his lungs and brain would burst, crouching in painful postures until his body became numb, starving himself until he was just skin and bones, and so on—it did not produce the hoped-for break-through. And one day, having weakened himself so much by fasting and deprivation, as he emerged from bathing in a stream, he fainted, and had it not been for the timely arrival of a passing goat-herd, who forced some milk between his parched lips, he would have died, and we would have heard nothing of him.

At this point Siddhartha saw that torturing his body like this was extreme and wrong and would never lead to Enlightenment, so he abandoned it and began to eat in order to regain his strength. This accomplished, he resolved to follow the way of meditation—avoiding, on one hand, the extreme of sensual pleasure, such as he had known in the

palace, and on the other hand, the extreme of self-torture, as he had recently followed. Then, as is well-known and needs little comment here, the Truth dawned in his mind, and he became Enlightened; He was then a Buddha!

Now, He knew, from His own experience, having tried and practiced the various spiritual disciplines of His day, as far as they could take Him, that *all roads do not lead to Rome*; they do not all lead to Enlightenment! Some paths took him part-way, but none took Him all the way.

This is not to say, however, that Ways other than the Buddha's are devoid of merit; we cannot be so bigoted as to think like that! All Ways—even the Buddha's Way—are means to an end, and there is enough in any Way to keep the average person busy for his entire life. Moreover, what the Buddha discovered while seated beneath the Bodhi-tree, and which set Him free—the Dharma, Truth, or Reality—is not confined or localized to Buddhism and Buddhists, but is universal, and there is nowhere, nobody and nothing where it cannot be found. Once comprehended, we can see it here, there, and everywhere.

Now, while Truth is the monopoly of no one Way, it is also not true to say that *all* Ways lead to Truth; some might, some might not. But, while it is silly and meaningless to babble such things as "All roads lead to Rome," or "All religions are the same, and lead to the same end," we cannot claim that there is only one Way to Truth, and that our Way is that Way. It is like this, as put by one master: *"Ye shall see the truth, and the Truth shall set you free.*"

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TO CHANT OR NOT TO CHANT

SOMEONE with whom I once briefly stayed in Melbourne appeared surprised that I ate breakfast—and *early*, at that—when he didn't, as he habitually got up late; maybe he thought I shouldn't either—or maybe should not eat at all! It's amazing what people expect of monks!

Naturally, we all have our own viewpoints and there's nothing wrong with this, as long as we understand that other people have their viewpoints, too, and not think that our way of looking at things is the only valid one in the world. Much fanaticism, and the tragedy, violence and war that flow from it, could be avoided if we realized this. Have your viewpoint, yes—you are entitled to it—but recognize and allow the viewpoints of others, too. To judge others from your own particular standpoint will not only make your world narrow, but is productive of much bitterness and conflict; it is also as wrong as thinking of other people as greedy pigs for eating breakfast merely because one does not—for whatever reason—eat breakfast oneself!

As a monk, I am often asked if I know how to chant. This question has become rather tedious. I am aware that many Buddhists regard chanting as an important part of their spiritual practice, so let us look into it somewhat. Why is chanting central to the practice of many Buddhists?

Some people think it meritorious to chant scriptural passages, even if they don't know the meaning of what they are chanting (the scriptures they chant are usually not in their native language, but in Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, archaic Chinese or Vietnamese, etc.). Some obviously think the scriptures have magical power, like '*Abra-ca-da-bra'* or '*Open Sesame,'* the mere uttering of which will bring about miraculous results, while disregarding the meaning. How, then, can the advice and wisdom of the scriptures they chant—and they *do* contain advice and wisdom, being the teachings of the Buddha—be applied and utilized in their

lives? It is rather like a cook-book in a language we do not understand: we may read and recite the recipes therein, but that would not help us to prepare the dishes described.

Because the essence is not understood or appreciated, too much importance is attached to the chanting and ceremonies of Buddhism, and they occupy a place they do not deserve. Consequently, they have come to be regarded as sacrosanct and beyond question, which is how things degenerate into superstition.

When China was about to invade and occupy Tibet, elaborate ceremonies and scripture-chanting were performed by lamas in the belief, hope and expectation that they would somehow magically protect Tibet and ward off the invaders. We know what happened, though the chanting and ceremonies were not to blame for that.

I can chant, somewhat; I learned before becoming a monk, in the Meditation Center in Penang. My ability to chant so surprised the resident monk there that he once said: “You have not been here very long, but already you could lead the chanting.” No big deal, no great achievement. I have a sense of rhythm and some musical ability, so it is not hard for me to learn chanting; if I wished, I am sure I could learn to chant in Chinese, Tibetan, Vietnamese, or any other language, just as I can chant in Pali together with Thai monks, Sri Lankan monks, Nepalese monks, and Indonesian monks, in their various styles; but it hasn’t led me to enlightenment.

I’m not saying that I consider chanting wrong or useless and should be abolished, for I do not hold that view; many people psychologically need such things, and cannot and should not be denied them; if at all, they should be gently weaned from them.

Personally, I found chanting with Thai monks, especially, very soothing; when Thai monks chant together, it has a rhythm like the rippling of a stream that carries one along with it, and when one pauses to take a breath, the

chanting continues and one just joins again in the uninterrupted flow. As a communal activity, it is very pleasant, with no sense of competition in it, as is found with some other monks; it has the effect of focussing and concentrating the mind, and can be very inspiring.

I still chant at times, and sometimes even perform ceremonies, but for people to whom such things are more important than to myself; yet I'm prepared to bend that far, as it may provide am opening for something more. My real joy, however, consists of sharing with others what I have experienced of Dharma, insofar as it can be shared; if it takes a ceremony to introduce people to the Dharma or lead them a bit further, I am willing to participate in it as a means to an end, but otherwise not; ceremonies, on the whole, leave me feeling 'flat', like Cola with the gas gone out of it.

But, to people who are so attached to chanting and ceremonies that they consider themselves better than those who do not chant, I might ask: "Did the Buddha chant?" In itself, chanting is neither good nor bad, but if people become proud thereby, it might be better if they didn't know how to chant.

Regarding what I said earlier about everyone having their own point of view: I recently saw the tail-end of something on TV showing the Anglican bishop of *Wollongong*, a town near Sydney, speaking of the new Buddhist temple (apparently, the largest in the southern hemisphere) in his town, and deploring the fact that Buddhism is the fastest-growing religion in Australia at the present time, attracting many converts; he claimed that only through Jesus could salvation be found. He is entitled to his beliefs, of course, as I've said before, but I felt embarrassed for him to hear him say such things, as he only displayed his narrow-mindedness and intolerance thereby, and actually provided a good reason for people to think about religions other than his. He *might* believe that salvation comes only through Jesus—he obviously *does*—but does he *know*, by his own

experience? And what, one wonders, does he know of other religions? Some people consider ignorance a virtue!

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GNOSTICISM

"THE GNOSTIC CHRISTIAN, like the Buddhist, but unlike the Church-Council Christian, held as fundamental the doctrine of Rebirth, so that his highest ideal was to acquire some degree of positive and direct spiritual insight while on Earth as, after many pious lifetimes, would ultimately produce in him the Enlightenment of Christhood. The Gnostic Christian prayed that upon his enlightenment of Christhood, he might be empowered to assist all mankind to reach the same goal. On the other hand, the Church-Council Christian, being forbidden by the Second Council of Constantinople in AD 553 to believe in the doctrine of Rebirth [the decree is as follows: "Whosoever shall support the mythical doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul, and the consequent wonder of its return, let him be anathema.' Thus, not until AD 553 did the 'Rebirth-doctrine' become, to official Christianity, a 'heresy.' Before that date it was, presumably, tolerated among Church-Council Christians, especially among those of them who were friendly to the Gnostic form of Christianity], was un-

able to hold the altruistic ideal of his Gnostic brother, and so came to adopt the lesser ideal of salvation for self alone, by faith in the infallibility of the Church's decrees and teachings. The effect on human society of the Gnostic Christian's altruistic ideal is positive, creative and unlimited, while that of the Church-Council Christian's is, by contrast, negative, non-creative and selfish."

(Taken from the Foreword of *TIBET'S GREAT YOGI: MILAREPA*, by Dr. Evans-Wentz).

FOUNDATIONS

SOMETHING MOST VISITORS to Singapore notice is its remarkable cleanliness, with which even many Western cities cannot favorably compare. But why is Singapore so clean? In one word: FEAR. People there are afraid of the penalties imposed for littering—namely: heavy fines—and therefore restrain themselves; it is not really from understanding that most Singaporeans (of course, there are exceptions) keep Singapore so clean, for I have observed Singaporeans in Malaysia—where the laws are not so strict or easily enforced—thoughtlessly scattering litter; I've also heard of this from several Malaysians, so it is not only my own observation.

By this, I'm not implying that Singapore shouldn't have strict laws (I'm happy that at least one city should be so clean; compare it with Bangkok, Jakarta, Manila, or even New York or London, and the advantages are obvious). What I am saying is that it is a pity that people should need such laws, as need them they do, for as I have shown above, those same people think nothing of trashing other countries where the laws are not so strict and there is little chance of being caught. Perhaps this is a reaction against rigid control or a way of asserting themselves. It means that after living under rigorous laws for so many years already, the meaning of those laws has yet to permeate deeply into their minds and bring about a genuine transformation of behavior. Understanding is a much firmer foundation for living than fear, but how to get people to understand? It is very difficult, and confirms the old proverb: "You can take a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink!"

Australia—and some other countries, too—now has an annual *Clean-up Day*, when people go out to pick up rubbish that others have negligently scattered. This campaign was initiated a few years ago by a man named *Ian Kiernan*. While sailing his yacht solo around the world, he was so

appalled by the amount of garbage floating in the seas that when he returned to Sydney, he informed some friends of his observations, and asked them to join him in doing something about it on a practical level. And so, because he cared enough to do something, instead of just thinking: "Oh, it's terrible, but I didn't do it, so it's not my responsibility," it has had a ripple-effect to the extent that, in 1993, an estimated 400,000 people took part in the clean-up nationwide, and every year since there have been more.

All praise to Ian Kiernan for his courage and determination, for striking a match and lighting the lamps of others waiting in darkness, unaware of the matches in their own hands! Many of us wait for others to make the first move and will then follow, hesitantly at first, perhaps, and often glancing around to make sure we are not alone, but with increasing confidence as we go along, so that later, even if we do find ourselves alone at times, it won't matter.

Now, I do not know Ian Kiernan, or anything of his religious affiliations (if any), but I doubt if he calls himself a Buddhist and burns incense to an image of the Buddha or Avalokitesvara for help or salvation, but I do know this: in doing what he did, he was practicing what Buddhists call *Dharma* or the *Way*, even if he was not aware of it; and in that sense, he may be called a Buddhist—much moreso, in fact, than people who call themselves 'Buddhists' but who do not live by the Dharma. You see, contrary to what many people think, Dharma is not something mysterious, esoteric or airy-fairy, that can be understood by only very few highly-intellectual or learned people; nor is it something to believe in and pray to for salvation, but something of ordinary everyday life, by following which we can help to make this world—*our* world, not *mine* or *yours*—a little bit better.

Now, does scattering garbage improve the world or not? It not only pollutes, destroys and causes problems for others, but is also an indication of the mental state of those who do it: careless, dull and stupid. Cleaning up where others have despoiled, however, signifies caring, thoughtful

and responsive minds. What we do is a reflection of what and how we think. And it is almost certain that those who go out to pick up garbage one day of the year, will not scatter garbage themselves throughout the year. And not only does this activity have a ripple-effect, spreading outwards from the man who started the campaign, but it also has a spill-over-effect in those who get involved, for it probably will not stop at just garbage, if it began there; it will affect other areas of their lives, too. It is nothing less than a spiritual or religious activity!

From my Sunday-school days—which weren't a waste of time after all—I recall a little song about foundations, based upon one of Jesus' parables; it is sound Dharma:

The foolish man built his house upon the sand
And the rain came tumbling down.
The rain came down and the floods came up
And the house on the sand went *c-r-a-s-h!*

The wise man built his house upon the rock
And the rain came tumbling down.
The rain came down and the floods came up,
But the house of the rock stood firm.

If we would examine our motives for doing what we do, and endeavor to replace belief, fear, greed, compulsion and external authority with understanding and responsibility, our lives would rest on much firmer foundations than they do. We would then do what is right simply because it is right, and for no other reason.

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BEYOND PREFERENCES

THE FACT THAT I'VE written of this subject elsewhere will not deter me from writing about it again, as it is important, and the more people we can inform about it, the better. It is this: How to love people and things we do not like.

In your life, as in mine, there might be at least one person you really do not like, and though you might be unable to explain exactly why you dislike that person so much, this is not surprising, as the roots of many of our feelings are hidden from us, and seem to have come with us at birth. We can see how siblings, raised in the same way and the same environment, have different likes and dislikes. Can we ascribe this to genes or chemical reactions in the brain? Personally, I find that idea rather repulsive, as it implies we are little more than machines or automatons, with almost no choice or control over our lives. Shall we then suppose our preferences are a carry-over from previous lives? We may, if we like, and if we believe in such, but the reality remains that we have these feelings, which, if not accepted and understood, often lead us into trouble and can sometimes cause a great deal of harm. Also, for those who have set out on a spiritual way, it can be disconcerting and disheartening to find one's likes and dislikes not crowded out and overcome by altruistic love and compassion for all, but remain with us, and even appear to grow stronger; we may seem torn apart and divided in ourselves by base and lower feelings of self and higher aspirations. Is this always the outcome of turning towards the light? Enlightenment is not easily won; we should understand this from the start, and be prepared for all kinds of hardships and set-backs. This is why we need different ways of looking at things.

Our life may be compared to a tree, which has two main parts: the part above the ground—trunk, limbs, branches—which we can see, and the part below the ground—the roots—which are out of sight. But, just because we do not

see the part below the ground, it doesn't mean that it is not there; indeed, if the part below the ground were not there, the part above the ground would also not be there, as it is dependent upon the former. Likewise, our present condition, with our preferences, tendencies, habits, and so on, has grown up out of the past, although we are unable to see much of the roots or underlying causes.

Now, we like to be able to explain things as we feel uneasy about things we cannot explain; unexplained things might endanger and threaten our sense of well-being and security. But instead of always trying to explain things, it is sometimes better to say "I don't know," though this is not easy and requires a bit of courage, as it is an admission of ignorance and weakness; however, if we are sincere in our quest for knowledge and enlightenment, it is unavoidable and has to be done; if it doesn't satisfy our curiosity, at least it is honest, and leaves us open to learn.

Now, if there is someone you strongly dislike—perhaps someone at work or even at home—you might try this: Be honest with yourself and accept your feelings toward that person, without pretending they are otherwise or trying to justify them, and say to yourself: "I don't like this person. I don't know *why* I don't like him, but I really can't stand him. However, he is a human being, with hopes, fears and aspirations, just like myself. Life for him, too, is probably a struggle at times, and he wishes to be happy and free from suffering, as do I myself. I am not really happy with the way I am now, with my faults and imperfections, and he is probably no different. So I won't let my feelings of dislike towards him lead me to do anything harmful to him, and, if I have an opportunity, I will do something to help him, as that is how I would like him to behave towards me, even if he doesn't."

If we can look at things this way—and it is quite different from the way many of us look at things, with feelings of resentment, ill-will, jealousy and malice—we may go beyond our selfish feelings of like and dislike, and reach the

level of Love—Love that grows from Understanding. Our dislike towards that person might remain, even while we love him, but this is not a contradiction; no-one likes everyone. It just means that we have put our lower and limited feelings to one side in order to deal with the situation—like rolling up our sleeves to wash the dishes. I am not speaking from hearsay but from experience; I *know* it works; so I am qualified—*Qualified By Experience* (Q.B.E.)—to speak of it, otherwise I would not be.

Let me use the story of the Buddha's cousin, as an example: from childhood, *Devadatta* had been a jealous rival of Prince Siddhartha, probably because he perceived in him qualities he himself did not possess. Later, when Siddhartha attained Enlightenment and became a Buddha, Devadatta became a monk and, as a result of his propensities and meditation, he developed certain psychic powers like the ability to fly, walk on water, pass through walls, and so on. But in spite of this he was not enlightened; his powers were only psychic and not spiritual. Moreover, his pride only increased thereby, and his jealousy intensified.

Uncontrollably ambitious, he started to think thus: "I, too, am a prince of the royal blood, just like Siddhartha. Why should he always have first place? I am just as worthy as he is!" Day after day, such thoughts gnawed away inside him until he could contain them no longer and went to the Buddha and said: "You have been leading the Order of Monks for a long time now and must be tired. Why don't you retire and let me take over?" But the Buddha knew Devadatta's evil intentions and so rejected his request.

This enraged Devadatta and he resolved to kill the Buddha. So he enlisted the aid of a gang of ruffians and instructed them to wait above a narrow path in the hills where the Buddha used to pass after His alms-round in the nearby town of *Rajagriha*, and when He came beneath the place where they were hiding, to push a huge rock over the cliff to crush Him. The ruffians did as they were told, and when they saw the Buddha coming, got ready behind the

rock until He was just about below them, pacing calmly along. Whether or not He knew what was about to happen, I cannot say, though some people, believing the Buddha knew everything, would declare, without hesitation, that *of course* He knew. Whatever, the would-be assassins put their weight behind the rock and pushed it over. It seemed that the Buddha must surely be crushed to death, but suddenly, the rock struck another rock and split into two, falling on either side of Him, only a small fragment striking His foot and drawing blood. The plot had failed.

Undeterred, from the depths of his jealousy and malice, Devadatta thought of another way to kill the Buddha. He knew a man in the town who had a fierce elephant that was always kept tethered up; approaching the owner, he asked to borrow the animal. Because Devadatta was quite widely-admired—and maybe also feared—for his psychic powers, the man agreed. Then Devadatta, knowing that the Buddha came down the street for alms every morning, told his men to intoxicate the elephant with liquor, and when they saw the Buddha coming, to enrage it by beating it with sticks and prodding it with knives, and then release it.

This they did, and the elephant charged onto the street, trumpeting and bellowing. The townspeople scattered and ran for cover wherever they could, until only the Buddha and some of His monks were left exposed. Seeing them, the mad elephant charged towards them, and Ananda, the Buddha's favorite disciple and personal attendant, realizing the danger, moved between the Buddha and the elephant, thinking: "Let me be killed instead of my master." But the Buddha said to him: "No, Ananda; stand aside," and raising His right hand, with palm turned towards the elephant, He radiated His Loving-kindness to it. And such was the power of the Buddha's Loving-kindness that the elephant was immediately pacified and fell to its knees in front of Him, its rage extinguished. So, again, Devadatta had failed.

Not long after this, Devadatta became very ill, and when the Buddha heard of it He said to some of the monks: "Let

us visit Devadatta." Surprised, one of the monks said: "But Devadatta is your enemy; he has tried to kill you several times before." The Buddha replied: "That is no reason for me not to love him, and if my love for Devadatta equals my love for *Rahula*, my son, let Devadatta recover." So they went to see Devadatta, and soon afterwards, he did indeed recover from his illness. Unfortunately, his jealousy and resentment towards the Buddha was not so easily overcome, being more deep-rooted than his physical sickness.

Now, it is clear from this story that after all Devadatta had done to harm Him, the Buddha held no thought of resentment towards him, but loved him unreservedly. But do you think the Buddha *liked* Devadatta? Do you think He approved of what he had done?

My sister in England, speaking of her eldest daughter, once told me that she loves her, as she is her daughter, but doesn't like her because of her character and behavior. I told her I understood what she meant and admired her perception and courage in making such a statement, which, for a mother, must be very hard to do. It is an excellent example of what I'm talking about here, and while my sister was talking about her long-term opinion, perhaps every mother knows how it feels to dislike their children at times when they are naughty, though they never cease to love them.

This side of Enlightenment, our personal likes and dislikes will always be with us in one form or another, but there is no need to be divided in oneself over them. What we need to do is understand them and control them rather than them controlling us, to be prepared to put them aside at times in the interest of higher things, rather than always giving way to them and letting them rule our lives. We can, and often do, blame other people and things for our shortcomings—our upbringing, society, lack of opportunities, and so on—or we can see that they are part of our conditioning and can be understood, outgrown and left behind. Nor must we be perfectly enlightened in order to under-

stand and put aside our selfish feelings; we can try to do it now—*and* somewhat succeed—if we wish. But if we try to be completely without ego, we will never succeed; it is not within our capacity, and our efforts will only be a further confirmation of ego. Ego is overcome, uprooted, destroyed, or seen for what it is—unreal, an illusion—only by the arising of Enlightenment. Consider the case of the Buddha Himself: right up until His Enlightenment there were still thoughts of self—egoism—in Him.

This side of Enlightenment, however, we must learn how to use ego, but in a skillful and non-harmful way, free from conflict and competition with other egos, must learn how to put ego aside when necessary; without ego, and the skillful use of it, we would be spineless, like jellyfish, and not even be able to stand upright. Properly used and harnessed, it is very useful for a long part of our way. Needless to say, we should not promote ego, as that is just as bad as constantly putting ourselves down.

Egolessness, like humility, is a result, and cannot be practiced or done. We cannot run before we can walk.

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FIRE AND BRIMSTONE!

ONCE, ADDRESSING AN audience at a Buddhist Society in a town in Malaysia, I spoke of Prince Siddhartha seeing the Four Startling Sights—an old person, a sick person, a corpse, and an ascetic—and said that, contrary to what the books say about this, I could not accept that he was seeing such things for the first time in his life, but that, on this occasion, his mind must have been particularly sensitive, and it was *as if* he were seeing them for the first time.

At this point, the president of the Buddhist Society stood up rather irately, and almost threatened me with damnation, saying that people who distort the scriptures will go to Hell! *Echoes of medieval Christianity!* I had visions of witch-hunts and people being stretched on the rack or burnt at the stake, merely because they were slightly different in some way, or didn't conform to the prevailing norm!

Well, that man and I obviously see things in different ways, but I cannot imagine the Buddha, who gave us the *Kalama Sutta*, and exhorted us to investigate things and find out for ourselves, saying anything like that. I will tell anyone, clearly and unequivocally, that I am *not* a believer; belief is something I reject as an impediment. Rather, I try to follow the way of the *Gnostic*, or Knower. A *Gnostic* would probably try to share what he has found with others, as something worth sharing (as Jesus is reported to have said: "No man lights a candle and puts it under a bucket, but on a candlestick, where it gives light to all that are in the house"); he would try to nudge and inspire others into finding the same thing, as he would see that it is within the capacity of all. He would never threaten people to get them to accept his point of view, knowing that it is not something that can be transmitted to just anyone, but must be experienced by people individually, when they are ready for it. It can, however, be hinted at, indicated, referred to by anal-

ogy, and thus brought nearer to those who might be ready for it. In so doing, of course, there is some risk involved, for if we lack wisdom in our presentation of things, and are over-zealous, instead of our words being well-received, they might arouse antipathy, and thus, not only defeat our purpose, but might result in disaster; look what happened to Socrates and Jesus, for examples of this: Socrates publicly said too much, was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens with his ideas, and was made to drink poison; and though Jesus warned against 'casting pearls before swine, and giving that which is holy unto dogs,' he himself did this very same thing, and brought about his own death thereby.

If we are not prepared to take the risks and suffer the possible consequences—in the hope that someone might understand—we must bite our tongues and keep quiet. But what would our world be like if no-one spoke out and said things that should be said? It would be a much darker and fearful world than it already is. Moreover, since we will die of something anyway, we might as well die doing something that, deep inside, we know to be the right thing to do.

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NOTHING SPECIAL

CONTRARY TO WHAT MOST PEOPLE THINK, religion is something ordinary rather than special, as it is concerned with 'ordinary', everyday life, and is not—or should not be—just for special days, like Christmas or *Wesak*—to be brought out, like best clothes, for the occasion, and then, when the day is over, to be stored away in the closet with the moth-balls until the next celebration. People who make of religion something special like that destroy it; they are responsible for its decline.

Religion should be as 'ordinary' as the air we breathe. We breathe not only on certain special days, but everyday and all the time, and if we do not breathe, we die! But, just because something is ordinary, that does not mean it is unimportant. There is nothing more important than air or water—things considered ordinary, in the sense of common.

We must turn around and see things with our own eyes and minds, instead of through the eyes and minds of others. Nobody can live for us. Why do we allow others to dictate to us what should think and do? We must discover what life means for ourselves.

Religion should not be just a part of our life, but the whole of it; it should be the focal-point around which all else turns. Actually, life and religion should not be seen as two separate things, but as one-and-the-same: Life = Religion, Religion = Life, although this will probably mean some adjustment to our ways of thinking of both, as I am trying to explain. We should live religiously, aware of ourselves and our place, aware of others, side-by-side with us, and their places, aware of their feelings, hopes, fears, their birth, aging, sickness and death. We have so much in common, especially pain and suffering. Suffering is the mortar that should bind us together in our living, and prevent us from

causing more unnecessary suffering in our poor overburdened world.

Some people say Buddhism is not a religion at all but a way-of-life; however, this is just splitting hairs. It doesn't matter what we call it; what is important is what we do with it. To some, it is a religion, with rituals, ceremonies, feast-days, and so on; to some it is a way-of-life, with certain principles to mould one's life around; to some it is a way of self-knowledge, liberation, enlightenment; to some, it is a philosophy; to others, it is a system of ethics, with rules for harmonious living; to still others, it is a means of business. What others choose to consider it and do with it should not concern us too much; we must decide, for ourselves, what we are going to do with it. If someone uses a surgeon's scalpel to cut down trees, or a bulldozer to clean his garden-path, that is his affair.

And Buddhism is not—as many Buddhists mistakenly think—only for monks and others who live in temples or monasteries, but for everyone and anyone who wants to make it his or hers. Monks have no secret books, teachings, or other things that are unavailable to other people; though there are teachings that apply specifically to monks, they are not secret teachings; there are secrets only if we close our eyes and refuse to see.

Some people are of the opinion that, just because they are not monks or nuns, they cannot follow or realize the Dharma. This is incorrect, and often an excuse for being lazy or for doing just whatever they want to do. People who say things like this have probably never tried to follow the Way, and therefore, do not know; they probably think it is something difficult, mysterious and special, whereas in reality, as I have tried to show in this and other articles, it is not. Actually, to say such things is to use the monks and nuns as scapegoats. How often do we hear people complaining about monks doing certain things, while they do the very same things themselves? If Buddhists saw monks killing even ants, mosquitoes or cockroaches—which most

of them don't, of course—they would soon complain, while thinking nothing of doing things much worse than this themselves. Needless to say, this is practicing double standards.

I refuse to be used as a scapegoat like this, and will shift the responsibility back onto people to do what they know to be right! I am not going to do it for anyone—I cannot; everyone must do it for themselves. People put the monks too high and themselves too low, expecting too much of the monks and not realizing their own importance; nor do they realize that—if they are Buddhists—they are also members of the *Sangha*, or wider Buddhist community. To be a Buddhist, as I've tried to show in this and other books, is not merely a matter of calling oneself so, but of striving to realize something of what the Buddha tried to indicate, and if we can do that, the name 'Buddhist' will be superfluous.

Let me speak plainer still, so that no-one will be in any doubt as to my reasons for writing as I do. Some people have described me as a 'revolutionary,' though in what sense they did so, I am not quite sure; but it is not a term I reject, for, in line with the Buddhist symbol of the Wheel denoting revolution (and a wheel has the sole function of turning, revolving, does it not?), I wish to inspire people with the will, determination and love to bring about a change in their lives—a turning towards light and spiritual awakening—instead of simply drifting through life and being blown along by the winds of change. I would like to quote, as appropriate here, from *The Lessons of History*, by American historians Will and Ariel Durant:

"There may be a redivision of the land, but the natural inequality of men soon recreates an inequality of possessions and privileges, and raises to power a new minority with essentially the same instincts as in the old. The only real revolution is in the enlightenment of the mind and the improvement of character, the only real emancipation is

individual, and the only real revolutionists are philosophers and saints."

Lao Tsu wrote, as if frustrated: "My words are easy to understand and easy to perform, yet no man under Heaven knows them or practices them." Most people look for something magical or esoteric, something different than what they perceive in their 'ordinary' daily lives, unaware of the wonders and miracles of life all around them. When a simple way is presented to them, shorn of the mumbo-jumbo and the accretions of centuries that they have grown used to, they are more than likely to reject it, and cling more firmly than ever to their old ways, even though they might understand little of these, too; the new and different is often regarded with suspicion and hesitation, and not without some reason, as it might be dangerous.

I do not write for those who habitually complain and blame others for the situations they find themselves in, and do not know how to or are unwilling to use their discontentment to bring about a positive change. I write for those whose disillusionment and dissatisfaction with life compels them to look for something different, something else, for those who wander through life 'beach-combing'—seeing beauty in things that the tides have tossed up but which others would pass by without a second glance. I write for those who are a bit 'out-of-the-ordinary,' those who will understand what I mean when I say that *ordinary is special*. Yes, my purpose is to disturb people, just as, when a person has overslept, and someone else calls him to wake up to go to school or work, and he says: "Oh, don't disturb me. I want to sleep"! Perhaps most people who I call will just turn over and continue sleeping, but some might respond, and wake up; the possibility of this makes my efforts worthwhile, and so: Onwards!

As a Westerner, I approach Buddhism not from a traditional point-of-view, and see it differently. To look at things from the view-point of tradition is to see them through rose-colored spectacles; piety often obscures what is here, and I

have said and written before that I consider myself fortunate to have come from 'outside' rather than being born into a Buddhist background, wherein, like fish in water, people seldom question and understand what is there, but merely take it for granted as part of the landscape. If Thailand were a Buddhist country, Buddhists everywhere would have a lot of explaining to do: why morality there is so low, why it has one of the highest and rapidly-rising rates of HIV and AIDS in the world, why child-labor and exploitation is common, why it is one of the main producers of illicit drugs and home of the world's most blood-thirsty pirates, why it played willing host to Pol Pot and his murderous demons and allowed its ports to be used to import weapons for them, why the wild-life there has been hunted to the point of extinction and why almost everything that moves there is killed, why nearly all its forests have been destroyed, and so on. We must still ask why, but as people, not as Buddhists; although Buddhists are people, it is not people as Buddhists who are responsible for those things. The majority of Thai people call themselves 'Buddhists,' and many wear numerous small Buddha-images around their necks as talismans or amulets, but that is just the superficial aspect of a religion, not the substance—only the name-and-form, and a name is never the thing it indicates; they do not really understand Buddhism.

I have singled Thailand out not because it is the only country where such things go on—unfortunately, it isn't—but because I wish to combat the widespread fallacy about it being a Buddhist country. Someone once told me that a Malay friend had asked him why Buddhism encourages prostitution, and when asked why he said so, replied: "Well, Thailand is a Buddhist country, and look how prostitution flourishes there!" Buddhism and prostitution exist side-by-side in Thailand, true, but the one is not responsible for the other, though—no doubt like many other people—I have wondered why Buddhism has not played a more active and positive role there, discouraging vice and encouraging vir-

tue. Far from this being the case, however, it is not unheard of for monks to perform blessing-ceremonies in bars and nightclubs, which is a kind of prostitution, too.

Doubtless, there are good Buddhists in Thailand, but Buddhism became a thing of tradition there long ago, and lost thereby its validity as something to live by, degenerating into something that people merely inherit and accept without question, in much the same way that we accept, unquestioningly, the air we breathe. The temples are there, the monks are there, yes, but it seems that, to many people, the monks are mere dispensers of blessings—similar to slot-machines: put your money in and get your blessings out—and not teachers of the Dharma. They expect monks to be 'fields of merit' in which seeds planted will yield good harvests. And so, Buddhism in Thailand has become a materialistic concern, instead of the great spiritual Way that it once was. People support the monks, help to build and maintain temples and monasteries for what they can get in return, on the material level; other aspects are of little interest to them, it seems.

There are over 300,000 monks in Thailand, but few of them, according to a report in Bangkok's daily paper, *The Nation*, dated 19-November-1987, "are qualified to teach Buddhism and morality. Religious Affairs Director, General Adul Rattananda, said that there are more than 19,000 Buddhist teaching centers all over the country, but only 75 of them in 50 provinces are up to acceptable standards. This is a serious defect in the education system of Buddhist monks. Poorly-educated Buddhist monks are to blame for spreading superstition and encouraging activities against Buddhist precepts instead of promoting the Teachings of the Buddha."

Fungus springs up on dead trees as they rot and break down. Likewise, when religion declines, beautiful but empty temples and churches spring up; people pay more attention to the external form than to the essence. When religion is alive and well, the essence is more important than the

form, and simple edifices serve as places where people can learn that religion is something to be used and applied wherever one is, and not just in the temple or church.

It is time to come down out of the clouds, to stop dreaming about life, and to live with our feet on the ground. If we can do so, maybe here, in this very 'ordinary,' every-day world, we shall find many special things; indeed, maybe we shall discover that ordinary is special, after all!

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CONDITIONING

START WITH A CAGE CONTAINING FIVE APES.

In the cage, hang a banana on a string and put stairs under it. Before long, an ape will go to the stairs and start to climb towards the banana. As soon as he touches the stairs, spray *all* the apes with cold water.

After a while, another ape makes an attempt with the same result—*all* the apes are sprayed with cold water. This continues through several more attempts. Pretty soon, when another ape tries to climb the stairs, the other apes all try to prevent it.

Now, remove one ape from the cage and replace it with another. The new ape sees the banana and wants to climb the stairs. To his horror, all the other apes attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs, he will be assaulted.

Next, remove another of the original five apes and replace it with a new one. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm. Again, replace a third original ape with a new one. The new one makes it to the stairs and is attacked as well. Two of the four apes that beat him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs, or why they are participating in the beating of the newest ape.

After replacing the fourth and fifth original apes, all the apes, which have been sprayed with cold water, have been replaced. Nevertheless, no ape ever again approaches the stairs. Why not? Because that's the way they've always done it and that's the way it's always been around here. (Anonymous).

And that is largely how people follow religion.

LOOK BACK, GO ON

WITH GREAT NUMBERS of people jobless, and more and more taking to drugs, the police seem either impotent in the face of rising crime or simply don't care; and the justice-system in some countries—Australia is a good example—is such that the criminal-minded have little incentive to desist from their activities. The world has become an open jungle, and no-one feels secure.

People talk of 'the good old days,' but they were not as good as we like to think, and few of us would return to living in the past, even if we could. The pace of life has increased and carried us away with it; mentally and spiritually, we've been unable to keep up with the rate of technological development and become schizophrenic as a result—that is, unbalanced and divided in ourselves; we now have greater capacity for good and evil than people ever had before, but it is seldom understood and used correctly. The three defilements of Greed, Hatred and Delusion have long been part of the human psyche, and there is no sign that we will outgrow and leave them behind. We must know what we are up against. The real enemy of Man is Ignorance.

We think of ourselves as civilized, but our civilization, in many cases, doesn't run very deep, and is only a veneer; scratch the surface, and beneath it we may find savagery; most of us are capable of it, and should recognize and admit this, so we will be better prepared to deal with it if and when, under suitable conditions, it emerges; we should not delude ourselves and think that we would never succumb to barbarism; we don't know what we are capable of.

Some years ago, there was a terrorist bomb-attack on a train in Italy, and one of the rescuers who volunteered to pull the injured, mutilated and dead passengers from the tangled wreckage was a young man who was so appalled by the horrific carnage that he went home, wrote a note

saying: “I cannot live any longer in this insane world,” and committed suicide.

In Melbourne, I knew a young man who was almost totally paralyzed as the result of a minor ear-operation that went wrong; his chance of recovery was very low. Trapped in his body between life and death, he wanted both to live and to die, but was unable to do either. We who are healthy cannot really imagine how he must have felt, but I must confess that, if I were in such a situation, I think I would want to die, too. He died after nine years in that state.

I understand and sympathize with that young rescuer feeling anger and despair, when he had gone with a full heart to help the innocent victims of such brutality, although this doesn’t mean I advocate suicide. I would counsel and advise anyone against it, while assuring them that the choice is always theirs, but that they should be prepared to accept the consequences of their actions, whatever they might be. By committing suicide he removed qualities from the world that the world needs more of to counter the rising tide of violence, hatred and terror: compassion, love and a willingness to reach out to others; the light that he used for others was extinguished. If everybody who cares about others, and is shocked by the savagery and madness of the world, took the easy way out by ending their lives, who would be left to oppose the forces of darkness and keep the flame of goodness and hope burning? May that kind-hearted person be well and happy wherever he now is!

All around us in the world there are unrecognized heroes, who are content to do what they can, wherever they are, to make life better for others. In many cases, they might not even be aware of the significance of what they are doing, but do it just because it is natural for them to do it; they do not look for name and fame, and are not concerned if others recognize their actions or not. Maybe they have reached a stage in their personal evolution where they do not have a choice but to act as they do.

I don't remember exactly when, but some years ago, an airplane crashed into the frozen Potomac River as it failed to take off from the airport in Washington D.C. Many people died in the icy water as the plane sank. But one man, whose name I do not recall, dived into the water again and again to rescue drowning people and pull them to safety onto the river-bank, until, attempting to rescue one more, he himself failed to surface. He surely must have known the risk of this happening, but he didn't let that deter him from trying; he died so that others might live.

We all know, or have heard of silent heroes, and have been inspired by them. We need the example of such self-effacing heroes so that we may face and overcome our fears and despair of life; they inspire us to go on.

Sometimes—like most people, I guess—I get frustrated and depressed, and wonder where I'm going; sometimes, I cannot see the next step ahead of me, and it seems like I've come to a dead end; sometimes, when things are difficult, and there seem to be no results—or I get results other than those I want—I wish I had never gotten into this line of things; and sometimes, death would not be unwelcome—it would be a release. But, whenever I feel like this, I turn around and look back on the way by which I reached the present. And do you think it was as straight as an arrow? Of course it wasn't, not for more than a short distance at a time, but twisted and turned, climbed and fell and sometimes even disappeared below ground, only to reappear elsewhere. Many times, there were obstacles, which, at the time, seemed insurmountable; the road was often pitted with pot-holes of despair; there was suffering and sickness, lethargy and blues, times when I was depressed and stuck in the doldrums, and didn't know what to do; there were times when I was lonely and sad, times of danger and fear, and times when the road ran near to madness and hell. It is a miracle that I survived, yet survive I did and survive I do at the time of writing this.

When I was 18, for some reason or other that I now no longer remember—or do not choose to—I was feeling so depressed that one night, I climbed over the railings of the park near my home, and went down to the lake, intending to drown myself. But when I got to the edge of the lake, the water looked very cold, so I turned around and went back home. I'm glad now that I lived to tell this tale. And does not my looking back on all the pains, defeats, and failures, the facing of dangers and obstacles, and the surviving thereof, help me to face other such things with courage and understanding? I have run the gauntlet of the past, and survived, and have learned something from it, and am even able to use it to deal with the problems and pains of the present. Surely, it is no small achievement. Has not my life—*your* life, *our* life—been an overall success, therefore?

Moreover, I'm now able to help others see things in the same way. If I had given up in despair, as I wanted to many times in the past, I wouldn't have what I now have to share with others who might be able to benefit from it—and there *are* such people, I know. But, through all my pain and frustration, I carried on—often with no conscious goal or purpose—and reached the present. How I managed, I do not know, but I'm glad I did; I'm happy that I have discovered something of my potential, something of value, which, by sharing it with others, is not diminished but only increased thereby. I cannot explain it, but must stand, unashamedly, with open mouth, speechless in wonder at the way I have come. And was your way any less wonderful?

And yet, although we have come a long way, there is still far to go, and we have no cause for complacency, no time to waste congratulating ourselves; we must go on. But we should go on in the knowledge that we are not living for ourselves alone, and that we are—each of us—changing the world, moment-by-moment, and making it a better or a worse place to live in. I have taken my stand, and decided to try to make it better, according to my limited capacity, which includes informing others that they can do so, too.

Now, it should not be thought that, just because I've spoken seemingly only about difficulties and pain here, that there were no happy and joyful times in my life, because of course there were—many. Indeed, if there had not been, if it had all been a way of suffering and despair, I'd probably not be here now, writing about it. Life is a mixture, but perhaps most people would agree that there is more unhappiness than happiness in life, perhaps because unhappiness comes unsought, unwanted and more frequently, and because it lingers longer than happiness, like the thorns on the rose. Many of us spend a lot of time looking for happiness, but find very little. Is happiness like gold or diamonds—rare and hard to find—while unhappiness is like sand and stones—all around?

No, the reason I seem to dwell on the painful side of life is to show that it can be turned around to our advantage; we have so much to work with, so let's get turning.

Instead of pretending to be strong and brave and trying to hide our weaknesses and faults, if we acknowledged and revealed them to others, they might derive strength from them, for weakness and strength always go hand-in-hand and strength has no meaning apart from weakness; indeed, strength comes from weakness, just as courage develops from fear. Courage does not mean the absence but the presence of fear; fear is the soil from which courage might grow. I recall something John Wayne once said on the subject: "Courage is being scared stiff, but saddling up and riding out anyway" (the fact that he was a movie-star whose words were written for him by others, and might not really have meant them does not invalidate them; it should not matter who said them, or why, as long as they make sense and are useful). It is alright to be afraid; it's a perfectly natural reaction to certain things, and can often save our lives; our ingenuity provides us with ways of dealing with, overcoming, and using it.

MORNING GLORY

BELOW IS A MOVING STORY I received not long ago from a new-old friend—a personal account which demonstrates that any situation may yield unexpected beauty; it is a matter of being aware and receptive. Again, it reinforces my idea that what we learn from an experience is more important than the experience itself, and that if we learn nothing, it is all such a waste.

This is a story about a moment in time, a great moment some 15 years ago. But to explain its significance, I have to go back even further.

My first trip to Australia was back in 1980. I was with my wife and first child. I was disappointed by not being able to find a proper job. A year later, we reluctantly decided to go back to Lebanon.

In Lebanon, I got a good job almost immediately, and was lucky enough to be able to re-rent the house we previously occupied. We loved that house. It was on a small hill overlooking all Beirut and the coast. Few people in Lebanon are lucky enough to live in houses with some land; most live in apartment blocks.

A few months later, specifically June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. By then, we had a new baby. My wife and I decided to leave home and seek refuge at my parents' place in Tripoli (north Lebanon, which was relatively safer).

After a few more months of turmoil and moving from one place to another, we finally went back home again. We were extremely delighted to go back.

Those were some of the most tormenting months in my life. Tripoli at that time was under the Muslim fundamentalists.

When my wife and I could see no end to this, we decided to leave Lebanon and go to Australia. To do that, we had to go to Beirut (which has the only airport in Lebanon). While we were there, we decided to go to our house on the hill and see how things were.

We were again very glad to see this house. We hadn't been there for more than a year. The situation seemed peaceful enough. So we decided to soldier on and cancel the travel plans to Australia.

Within a couple of weeks, the civil war in Lebanon started to take another turn. The beautiful hill on which we lived and which was 'safe' turned into a battle-ground. We fled again, this time to Beirut, and rented a filthy, small, and very expensive furnished apartment. We lived there for nearly a year. When finally that particular part of Beirut turned into a battleground in February 1984, we had to flee to Tripoli again. At that time I lost my job. We stayed with my parents for 5 months.

Within a couple of weeks, the calm was broken by the occasional sounds of sniper bullets, followed by more frequent skirmishes with machine guns. Then the inevitable happened. Shells started falling, and we would run with our babies to a shelter. Luckily, most of the shelling was a bit distant. When I say distant, I am talking about a few hundred meters, not kilometers.

Until one day, as we were hiding in the shelter like worthless beings, a 120 mm mortar shell fell extremely close. We heard the shrapnel hitting the thick limestone walls of our shelter. Our next-door neighbors were all with us in our little shelter, as their house didn't have one. Luckily, no one was hurt. It was late at night, and as the power had been cut, we couldn't see much, except that all windows were broken.

The next morning, during a lull in the madness, we walked outside to see the aftermath. We found a huge hole in our neighbors' ceiling (the same neighbors who

were sheltering with us); there were fragments of the shell, broken glass, smashed flower-pots, and pieces of brick and rubble all over the place. The whole landscape was covered with dust. It was all the same color, the ugly color of dust. It was one of the most depressing scenes you could ever imagine.

In the midst of all this, as I was cleaning up somewhat, I beheld a scene which turned the whole picture around. Among the many plants we grew in our garden was a morning-glory plant. As you know, the morning-glory flowers open in the morning and close for the rest of the day. Totally indifferent to what had gone on around it the night before, the morning-glory plant had produced new, fresh, clean, bright, beautiful, and colorful flowers. In the middle of the filth and rubble, and while the leaves of the morning-glory plant were covered with dust too, those flowers were the only things with color.

My mood changed from extreme sadness to extreme joy. I showed those flowers to my wife and the whole neighborhood. To my wife, they meant hope. To others, they meant nothing at all. To me, they not only meant hope, they also meant that no matter what happens around you, no matter how much filth is thrown on you, keep doing the right thing and be beautiful. I then started to take a different look at the name of the flower (morning-glory) and the concept of “morning.” What a glory did those flowers bring to that morning and every other morning. In most days, they go unnoticed, I thought. I then wondered, isn’t every morning a new beginning? Isn’t every morning glorious?

It was at that moment that we decided to stop clinging to Lebanon and our house and move on. A few days later, we were in Australia.

I took photographs of that scene, but they can never express the true meaning of that scene.

That morning-glory plant was one of my great Dharma teachers. Every time I see a morning-glory plant now, I look at it, smile and say thank you.

Some times, I get asked what made me come to Australia, and occasionally I say a morning-glory flower.

FOR SALE

T *MIGHT* BE THE OLDEST profession in the world, but few people would consider it honorable, and even the most-liberal people would probably have some reservations if their sisters or daughters were to announce their intention to *ply the trade*, especially in this time of AIDS. However, before we open our mouths to condemn, we should realize there are many kinds of prostitution, and not just the sex-for-sale kind. We can prostitute—degrade or sell—ourselves in a variety of ways. It is said that every man has his price and can be bought, and though there must be some incorruptible people, they are probably so rare that, for the sake of our purpose here, we may consider this statement to be generally true.

For most of us, how long would our principles (supposing we have any) and indignation stand up and hold out before we surrender to one or some of the many forms of pressure that may be brought to bear upon us—poverty, hunger, sickness, fear, greed, envy, desire for fame and power, and so on? Who would dare say he would never succumb?

Most of us have role-models, especially when we are young. Unsure of ourselves in our tender and formative years, or not yet having found our own minds and a direction in life (which, sadly, some never do), we tend to hang onto, identify with, emulate, and follow people we admire and take as our ideals—people like parents, singers, TV-and-screen personalities, sportsmen, and so on. I was once in this position myself, and some of my idols were The Beatles, The Moody Blues, The Rolling Stones, and Bob Dylan, who inspired me with their words, and contributed a lot to my own journey through life. They were—and I liked them for this as well as for their music—rebels against authority and spokesmen for their generation. They said things to and for me then that I could not say for myself at

the time; of course, I was also caught up in fashion and the 'counter-culture'; it is hard to go against the current when we are young, even if we want to, which I didn't.

As with so many others of my generation, their influence upon me was considerable, not just in the area of rebellion against authority—(which is a normal part of growing up, of bursting the bonds of parental protection and guidance, and striking out on one's own. Sadly, rebellion at this stage is often blind, destructive and unguided by intelligence; thus, its force is soon wasted and spent)—but also in helping me discover the spiritual dimension of life, which now, as I look back, seems to have been near the surface, awaiting something to trigger it off. The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's* album, widely regarded as a revolution in itself, included a song called *Within You, Without You*, the words of which I wish to present here, as they had such an impact on me, and for those who might never have known them:

"We were talking
About the space between us all,
And the people
Who hide themselves
Behind a wall of illusion,
Never glimpse the Truth,
Then it's far too late,
When they pass away.

We were talking
About the love we all could share,
When we find it,
To try our best to hold it there;
With our love, with our love
We could save the world,
If they only knew.

Try to realize it's all within you,
No-one else can make you change;
And to see you're really only very small,
And life goes on within you and without you.

BECAUSE I CARE

We were talking
About the love that's gone so cold,
And the people
Who gain the world and lose their soul,
They don't know,
They can't see;
Are you one of them?

When you've seen beyond yourself
Then you may find
Peace of mind
Is waiting there;
And the time will come
When you see we're all One,
And life flows on within you and without you.

Another song by The Beatles, released in 1968, was *The Inner Light*, which used words from the *Tao Te Ching:*

Without going out of your door,
You can know all things on Earth;
Without looking out of your window,
You can know the ways of Heaven.
The farther one travels,
The less one will know.

The Hippy movement that came into being towards the end of the 'Sixties, with its ideals of love, peace and sharing, was short-lived, probably because so many phony people jumped on the bandwagon and corrupted it; but it was a significant milestone, nevertheless. Some people retained the ideals they found in those days, and the Green Movement has grown out of it; it hasn't simply disappeared and ceased to exist. Most 'hippies,' however, changed like chameleons, and adopted other fashions; many of today's 'yuppies' were previously hippies, though they might deny it now. (And who did Bill Clinton think he was kidding when he admitted smoking marijuana during his university days, but claimed he did not inhale it? Next he'll be claiming that his wife became pregnant by 'immaculate conception,' without his help! Who gives a damn if he *did* smoke mari-

juana before, as long as he doesn't smoke it now? It's a different thing, however, to tell transparent lies about it).

In the '60's, there was a song which satirized the hypocrisy of singer-musicians, some of the words of which went:

The folk-singer came from America
To sing in the Albert Hall;
He sang his songs of protest,
And fairer shares for all;
How the rich were much too rich,
And the poor too poor by far;
Then he drove back to his penthouse
In his brand-new Rolls-Royce car.
What a world! What a place!
Ain't you glad you're a member of the human race?

This was clearly about Bob Dylan, the undisputed leader of 'the Protest Movement' that began in the US and spread all over the Western world. His most well-known song, *Blowin' in the Wind,* was one of the anthems of the anti-Vietnam-War movement. He often sang of the poor and underprivileged and the injustice in society, but in the end was swallowed up by the lucre he generated. It is hard not to feel cynical about things like this. And even the rock-concerts that have been staged in recent years to raise money for charity: it is a simple matter for singers and musicians to perform for an hour or so, doing something—singing and making music—that really, is more play and pleasure than work; although many people *do* benefit from their efforts, they themselves lose nothing and become no poorer thereby.

Is it a sign of becoming old that I am thinking this way, and am no longer interested in or inspired by such people, who do not mean what they say or sing? If so, I have no regrets about being no longer young; I have found something better to compensate me for that loss.

I was in the Bataan Refugee Camp in Philippines when I belatedly heard of the murder of John Lennon in New

York in 1980, and it came as a great shock to me, as I had long admired him. This was the man who wrote and sang:

Imagine no possessions:
I wonder if you can?
No need for greed or hunger,
A brotherhood of man,

but who left assets totaling about $150 million. And fellow-Beatle, Paul McCartney, at the time I wrote this in '91, was said to have a fortune of over $700 million! Money in such amounts is obscene in a world where millions of people are starving to death. Why do we place such preposterous value on entertainers? Surely, we have our priorities wrong!

At a party in Manila's Malacañang Palace before Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos were toppled from power, their children sang the current hit-song *We are the World,* obviously unaware of the meaning of the words. How casually we open our mouths to speak!

It is common for celebrities to 'star' in commercials on TV, endorsing a multiplicity of products; but are they convinced, one wonders, of the quality or superiority of the things they promote, or do they say what they say merely for the huge fees they are paid therefore? Have they so little self-respect and dignity that they can say anything for money? Are they, like beggars, so in need that they willingly discard their integrity? Or had they none to discard? I'm reminded of the four British businessmen who carried the cannibalistic mass-murderer Idi Amin on their shoulders in a procession while he yet ruled in Uganda. Did they really have no choice about this? How will they ever explain to their grandchildren why they were prepared to demean themselves so?

Of course, governments worldwide supply examples of unscrupulous behavior, and if we are not careful, we might find ourselves adopting their standards in our personal lives. Trade is carried on with murderous regimes in other

countries, just to bring in more revenue for the 'pollies' and government-officials to waste and squander. Australia still trades with Burma, for one current example, just as the Thai government, for years, played host to one of the most brutal and genocidal regimes in history, allowing its ports to be used for the importation of arms for the Khmer Rouge, and provided luxury accommodation, armed escorts, and treatment for minor ailments in Bangkok's best hospital for the monster Pol Pot himself! Britain, among other countries that produce arms, supplies land-mines to whoever will pay; many amputees owe their misfortunes to Britain's greed! And why does the US continue to insist that Iraq is still hiding weapons of mass-destruction, when Iraq claims otherwise? Because it supplied them in the first place, and so knows what is there! Governments have no scruples or sense of shame whatever!

If the world is like this, must it always be so? While we must know how it is, must we be like that ourselves? Is there no alternative? Of course there is! We can regard corruption, hypocrisy, injustice and so on as our teachers and learn from them what *not* to do. It requires a certain amount of scorn for the way of the masses, who do not, I am convinced, know where they are going, but it is scorn based on understanding and love of truth and real values, rather than on conceit and a feeling of being better than others. If we want our world to improve instead of deteriorating further, we must take a stand.

To conclude: It should be possible to learn something from everyone, without necessarily following or even liking them. It is just as important to know what is wrong as it is to know what is right.

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LISTENING AND HEARING

OFTEN, WHEN WE LISTEN TO SOMEONE, we do so with minds already made up about what's being said, and thus filter things through our preferences and prejudices. We listen with a purpose, with a center: the 'I.' To hear, on the other hand, is less self-centered, less of a purposeful act, is more passive and receptive.

Some years ago, I stayed in a Vietnamese Buddhist temple in California, where the chief monk asked if I could lecture on Buddhism in university. Conscious of his academic achievements, and liking people to address him as 'Dr.' he seemed a little surprised when I replied: "No, I cannot lecture, but I can preach." I meant that I do not regard Buddhism—or rather, *Dharma*—as something academic, something merely of and for the head, but more a thing of the heart or gut, something that must be understood deep down inside. Lectures are usually for the head, but sermons are for the heart, and my purpose, in speaking and writing as I do, is to try to inspire and awaken people spiritually. I have little to do with the world of Academia.

Reality is Here-and-Now, but we seldom see it, because we are usually elsewhere, inattentive and unaware, thinking of the past, planning, dreaming or worrying about the future. Moreover, our beliefs and fantasies about life are not in line with life-as-it-is, and prevent us seeing what is right in front of us. It is as if we are blind, and also as if we are deaf, for although many people have tried to awaken us to the realities of life, their words go in one ear and out of the other. Do we have super-highways through our heads, from one ear to the other, with no stopping allowed?

Disregarding all the controversy surrounding him, and to give credit where it is due, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh said some pretty good things. Among his ideas that I remember is this one: The reason why one teacher some-

times seems to contradict things said by other teachers is not necessarily because what the other teachers said was wrong, but because of the tendency in many of us to become bored. We 'turn off' if we hear something repeated a few times, thinking that we already know it just because we've heard it before and can maybe even repeat it, or—worse—begin to think of it as 'the same old hash, recooked over and over again'. This is the way of proud and shallow minds that do not perceive things clearly but always crave something new and entertaining.

Because of this tendency, teachers who wish to share with others their 'good news' must constantly devise new ways to present it, to keep it fresh, for unless people are very hungry, they will not willingly accept stale bread. This is the reason why telling people that if they live well in this world, when they die they will go to heaven, but if they are sinful, they will go to hell, is almost non-effective today; it has been used for too long and is worn out. To tell a small boy that if he is good you will give him a candy, but if he is naughty you will spank him, might produce the desired effect in him, as small boys usually like candies and fear spankings; but to use the same technique on a grown man would hardly work, and might even elicit the response: "Oh yes? You want to try?!"

Now, when a teacher teaches an academic subject, he presents facts and figures to his students, aiming at their heads, but when a preacher preaches, he aims at his listeners' hearts, trying to inspire them. He knows he might have nothing new to say, really, and that his hearers might know already, but what he nevertheless tries to do, is to 'strike a light.' We may use the analogy of matches and a matchbox: the preacher is the box, his listeners the matches. Neither the matches, as such, nor the box contain fire, but when a match is struck against the box, fire may be produced. Or his listeners are like knives, and he like a stone on which the knives may be sharpened.

The listeners depend upon the speaker, the speaker depends upon the listeners; each needs the other to be what they are: if there is no speaker, there will be no listeners; if there are no listeners, there will be no speaker. If the listeners are careful not to confuse the personality of the speaker with the words he speaks—for the two are not the same—it becomes possible to learn something useful from people we may not like, whereas if we pay too much attention to the speaker's personality, our capacity to learn from him becomes limited thereby.

Before delivering a sermon, the speaker would do well to reflect thus for a few moments: "Of what I am going to say, the well-spoken words are the Buddha's; the rest are mine." Pride is always quick to spring up, like weeds in an untended garden; we must constantly be on guard against it. Truth is greater than us; we live by truth, or the laws of life, just as we live by air; but we cannot possess it and call it ours. We depend upon it, not it upon us. To prevent pride from springing up, and to keep a proper perspective, we must give truth center place, instead of our self (Christians would say 'Give God center place,' the difference being that to them, 'God' is a person, while to Buddhists, Truth, or Dharma, is not; it is useless to pray to Truth, as there will be no answer. Instead of praying, Buddhists try to align themselves with Truth, to live in accordance with it, and become one with it).

The success of a Dharma-talk depends not just upon the presentation and eloquence of the speaker, but also upon the attentiveness and interest of the listeners; in fact, it depends more on the listeners than the speaker, for even if the speaker is dull and uninspiring and has nothing much to say, but the listeners are attentive, they may still get something good and useful from his words. If the listeners are dull and bored, however, even if what is being said is of great clarity and marvelous quality, it will not penetrate their inattentive minds and bring about a transformation.

What is said during a sermon might be new to the listeners, but if the speaker has said the same things in other places, to other people, thus repeating himself, it might become boring to him, and if he becomes bored with 'the same old thing,' this will show and be communicated to his listeners. So, the speaker must attempt to avoid becoming bored with his own words and presentation.

It is easy to know if the audience is with one or not. According to my experience, if the audience *is* with one, really paying attention, it is possible to go on for hours, without being aware of time or things like hunger, fatigue or even pain; one draws energy from the rapport with the audience. Conversely, if the listeners are bored and not interested, shifting restlessly, talking to each other, or yawning, the speaker picks this up and to rouse them from their lethargy becomes a task so difficult that it sometimes seems impossible, and to continue the talk becomes an ordeal.

Repetition cannot be avoided. The Buddha must often have repeated Himself during His long ministry of 45 years. He said Himself: "Just this do I teach: Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the End of Suffering, and the Way to the End of Suffering." Of course, the ways in which He presented this were many and varied. It is said that He had 84,000 different ways to teach, but this should not be taken to mean literally 84,000, no more and no less; it means infinite ways to teach, according to the situation and the levels of His listeners. So, it is a mistake to think: "Oh, I've heard all this before," because even if the words are exactly the same, as in a book—which they aren't, of course—it would still not be the same, as the situation is different with every talk (and with each and every event, big and small, in fact), and both the speaker and the listeners have changed. If we understood this, we would not listen with minds grown stale, but with eagerness and attention.

Dharma is Truth, and this applies not just to things outside, but also to things inside. So, when we pay attention to a Dharma-talk, the Dharma that we hear resonates with the

Dharma inside, and we feel at-one with it; joy arises, tears might come to our eyes and even run down our cheeks. And, because joy is one of the prerequisites of Enlightenment, it is even possible for Enlightenment to arise in this way, as it often did as people listened to the Buddha speak.

I often give Dharma-talks, but seldom have the chance to listen to one. Sometimes, I feel hungry to listen, and if the chance to listen coincides with my hunger, I feel happy, even if the subject-matter is basic and not new to me, and even though I might have said the same thing myself many times before. I feel joy because the basic things are important; they are important because they are basic, and important things maintain their importance and do not change much. If/when we appreciate things on this level, we are in tune with the Infinite, the All; and when we are in tune with the Infinite, we can see and feel It all around, in everything; if It were not in everything, It would not be the Infinite.

So, interest and joy in the Dharma are vital if we are not to waste our time listening to a Dharma-talk. This does not mean that we should listen with minds full of concepts and foregone conclusions, nor with credulous and naïve minds, nor with excessive respect, thinking that each and every word must be absolutely, 100% true merely because it is said by such-and-such a person, or that by so listening, great merit will accrue. Some people appear to think that the Dharma is magical in itself, and can somehow save them without any effort on their parts except blind, unquestioning belief. We should listen with open, sensitive and receptive minds, minds humble and free from the thought that 'I know all this already.' And humility is not a thing we can practice or develop, but comes about as the natural result of seeing things clearly.

What we are looking for is already within us; in a way, it might not be wrong to say we know it already, but we don't know that we know it. This is why, when someone explains it to us, we might say: "Is *that* what it's all about? But I've

known that for years already! It's so simple!", though this would be said with joy at discovering something rather than with pride. Yes, it's so simple, and it is usually not what we expect or are looking for, because we imagine it to be extraordinary or miraculous, and so we fail to see what is here. It is as if we have been sitting on a treasure-chest all along, and didn't realize it. Therefore, it is necessary for someone to come along and turn us around, to introduce us to ourselves, as it were. And, as I write this, a passage from *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran, comes to mind:

"No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half-asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom, but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his knowledge, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind."

Because it is customary to give sermons at regular times, many sermons are given mechanically, to fill a space or discharge an obligation. People get 'turned off' by this. It is not necessary for sermons to be long and windy affairs; in fact, the shorter and pithier they are, the better. Many sermons of the great Masters, like the Buddha or Jesus, lasted only a few minutes, as they were able to get to the heart of things directly and quickly, without beating around the bush, and to explain it simply and clearly.

Krishnamurti, an eloquent speaker, never prepared a talk beforehand, and seldom knew what he was going to talk about until he got to the place where he was to speak and saw the audience. Indeed, on the way to deliver a talk, he was known to say, as if with some nervousness: "What am I going to talk about?" But, face-to-face with his audience, striking words, simple and direct to the point, devoid of sophistry and pretense, full of beauty and wisdom, deliv-

ered with passion and authority, poured forth, so that he seemed to be addressing each listener individually.

There are advantages to preparing a talk in advance, as then the speaker has always something to depend upon, whereas if he does not prepare, he has nothing to fall back on, if necessary. Speaking spontaneously, one can sometimes give inspired and inspiring talks, but there are times when one is dry, like a well without water, and has nothing to say; the words won't flow. But the trouble with prepared speeches is just that: they are *pre*-pared: cut-and-dried beforehand, like summer hay, not new and fresh to suit that particular situation alone, and so the spontaneity is lacking.

If we really understand the essence of religion, we will be able to present it in ways suitable for various conditions without losing the substance. If, however, we insist on retaining, unchanged, the traditions and forms of the past, we should not be surprised to lose the support of the people, especially the young.

The world is full of books, and more are churned out now than ever before, at the expense of the Earth's forests. We read books, listen to talks, lectures, and sermons on religion and philosophy, but in some cases, only become mentally constipated thereby. Maybe we read too much about such things and listen to too many lectures and talks. To know a little, and use it, is much better than to know a lot but be unable or unwilling to use it. To know heaps of theory and philosophy, without applying it in one's life, is just old bones! A sick man repeating the word 'medicine' like a *mantra*, without actually taking the medicine, can hardly expect to be cured thereby. Likewise, to use the word 'Enlightenment' and discuss and speculate about *Nirvana*, the state of spiritual liberation, and so on, is just a waste of time and life; we must follow the Way, and each step, as we take it, is important. If we are on the beach, for example, and would like to be on the mountaintop, we must begin to walk towards, and climb the mountain; it is not by wishing to be on the top that the mountain can be climbed.

Listening is an art few people master. An outstanding example of it can be found in Herman Hesse's famous novel, *Siddhartha*, in the person of *Vasudeva*, the ferryman, who learned from the river how to listen; he seldom spoke, but when people opened their hearts and told him their stories, they left feeling lighter. Often, there is no need to say anything, but just to listen, sympathetically, without judging. To cultivate this art, we must realize that we have two ears and one mouth, not the other way around.

There is a time to listen and a time to speak. When people are speaking to us, we should respect them and allow them to finish what they are saying without interrupting. We can cultivate the art of listening in ourselves, but we cannot make others listen to us. If I am speaking to someone and they interrupt me, I take it as a sign that they are not interested in what I am saying and stop speaking, and if they do not ask me to resume what I was saying, I will not do so.

The marvelous human voice is not just a means of communication but also a musical instrument, and using it as such is another art. We must know how to control it, both in sound and volume. Voice can and should be a great asset, but often is not. Many of us chatter and speak loudly when it is not necessary; some people sound like crows or seagulls, and it is quite unpleasant to be around them.

MEDITATION WITHOUT THE CENTER

BEFORE RUSHING INTO ANYTHING, it is advisable to do some research; this applies to spiritual matters no less than to material concerns, for if we rush into things, we might go wrong for a long time, suffering as a result, and regretting it later on. Some time given to the investigation of things would probably be well-spent.

We seem to have a propensity to grasp onto things, thereby becoming stuck. Perhaps it is the fragility and insecurity of life that compels us to hold onto things as a means of support and defense, much like the proverbial drowning man clutching at straws. We hold onto ideas, concepts and beliefs more firmly than to material things; for example, we can go through life holding the same beliefs, little changed, but might move house several times, have many cars, selling one and buying another, and even get divorced a few times, like some movie-stars. We crave psychological more than material security, but this is not surprising, as security is really a state of mind, and if we do not feel secure mentally, no amount of material possessions can compensate for it. If we feel insecure, we grope around looking for someone or something to support us; we worry, doubt, and ask people if they really *do* love us—parents, children, husbands, wives, friends—and become tedious thereby. To feel insecure is quite horrible, and leads to many other negative and undesirable states of mind. How is it possible to be happy if we feel insecure?

The last few years have seen an upsurge of interest in meditation; meditation has become popular, as if it's something new that we've never known before. Many of us plunge into practicing meditation without much understanding or preparation, and often either out of greed to attain something we've heard may be attained, or from fear of not

attaining it and thus remaining as we are—the prospects of which are not very appealing—or of even slipping back. Unaware that meditation, in a sense, is something ordinary that we've been doing—or that has been going on in our minds—ever since we began to think, we dive headlong into all kinds of practices which we have been told, and so believe, will lead us to Enlightenment. Eagerly we begin, but lacking a firm foundation in ourselves, many soon grow discouraged when we get no quick results, and easily quit. Others continue, convinced that the path we are on is the right one, merely because it *is* our path. Because we so desperately want to attain something, it often happens that we bring about a self-projected end, and see just what we want to see, ignoring everything else. Some of us are so impatient for results that we can think of nothing else, and either become fanatics about it or/and 'blow a fuse' and short-circuit, becoming mentally deranged. Many get stuck on what we consider to be the correct posture for meditation, and insist that it be done in the lotus position, with right hand on left hand, thumb-tip lightly touching thumb-tip, eyes down-cast and half-closed, fixed on a point just in front, etc. Somewhat naughtily, perhaps, I like to ask: "If a person has lost his legs, and cannot sit in the lotus-posture as a result, does it mean he cannot meditate?" The mind is not in the legs, is it?

Now, I'm not implying we shouldn't sit in meditation in this manner, and that it is all a waste of time, for it does have its benefits, as long as we are careful how we go about it, and know why we wish to do this particular thing. We must be careful not to defeat our own aim, which we would if we set about meditation with the idea of becoming enlightened or gaining insight thereby, for meditation like this has a center—the self, or the one who is meditating—and whatever has a center will also have a circumference, even if it is a million miles away. And so, starting off with self at the center, we will ultimately meet self again at the

circumference, and lo! will be back where we began, and still in *Samsara*.

Though it is useful as a disciplinary exercise of the mind, it will not lead to enlightenment if we are looking for it, for when we look for something, we do so with an image or idea in mind of what we are looking for. This is fine if we already know what we are looking for, because then we will recognize it if/when we come across it. But since we have not yet any knowledge or experience of enlightenment—*full* enlightenment, anyway, if there is such a thing—how shall we begin to look for and recognize it? This is the problem that the practice of meditation gives rise to.

But there is a kind of meditation that has no center and therefore no circumference, that is not *practiced* or *done,* but which, rather, comes to us, or creeps up on us when we are not looking for or expecting it. It is hard to say if there are any conditions for its arising—and better not to say, as people would try to create those conditions in the hope that the meditation would automatically follow as a result, and thus, once again, it would be a manufactured thing with a center. It seems to come when we are at ease with our surroundings, at peace with the world, not worrying about anything, not looking for anything, when the mind is calm and clear, when we are sensitive, open and receptive, when joy is near the surface.

But, though I have named some of the factors that appear to be present when this meditative state arises, I must stress that it cannot be produced, that it is not within our capacity to 'make it happen,' and in that sense, we — that is, the 'I' in us—cannot become enlightened. "Why not?" you might ask; "Then what is the point of following the Dharma?" You see? Just look at the nature of this question: clearly, it reveals the desire to get something out, without which there would be considerable doubt and hesitation about following the Way. "If I'm not going to get anything out, then why should I bother to live by the Dharma? I

may as well live without restraint, having a good time and enjoying myself!" Clearly, those who think like this—and it is not rare—are wrongly motivated. Why follow Dharma? Because it is the natural thing to do once we have seen how life is; it is not a matter of getting something out, but of putting something in.

Why do I say we cannot become enlightened? Simply because enlightenment has no room for self; the idea of 'self,' as opposed to 'others,' must dissolve and disappear for enlightenment to arise, or, to put it another way: enlightenment burns out and destroys the concept of self. Whichever way we look at it, selfishness and enlightenment cannot co-exist in the same mind; one of them must dominate, and we all know which one usually does. Krishnamurti once put it this way: "To talk of so-and-so 'attaining liberation' is a misuse of terms. That which is liberated is always life, not the individual. Indeed, it is at the expense of the individual that such liberation is achieved."

Many of us go about meditation in a materialistic way: wishing to attain something, to get something out. It would be better, before we begin anything, to examine our motives for doing it; it might save us a lot of time and trouble.

Meditation is really a way of learning about life—life as it is, and not how we wish it to be. This requires we look with dispassionate minds, just to see what is here, instead of imposing our values and opinions on things, and saying things like 'This is good/bad,' 'This is nice/not nice,' 'I like/dislike this/that,' etc. A good exercise is to look closely at something that one was formerly afraid of—if anything—such as a snake or spider, for example, and observe it doing what it does. The more carefully one observes it, the more closely one will feel *with* it, and in so doing, might realize that the fear of it has quietly ebbed away, replaced with a feeling of rapport, of atonement—*'at-one-ment'*—with it; one has entered into the spirit of the thing observed, and the fear of it that was formerly there has gone.

As we grow older, we tend to lose our spirit of inquiry, and become weighed down by the cares and concerns of the world; our vitality dries up, and we become like old bamboo, stiff and dry, and set in our ways. Yet is this inevitable? Must it be so? Have we no control at all over it?

It is vital to maintain our interest in life, and our research into it, so that our inquiries sink down into the subconscious, or deeper part of the mind, and go on there, even during sleep. Meditation is not just something that takes place when we sit in a special posture, but is something that can go on anywhere, at any time. It is a matter of learning about life, of seeing it as it really is, instead of wishing it would conform to our desires. We are all parts of life, fragments of the whole; we belong to life, rather than it belongs to us. If life were really ours, we could say, with all certainty, "I'm not going to grow old, get sick, or die." But the fact that we *do* grow old (if we are lucky), get sick, and die, shows that life is not ours, as a possession; on the contrary: *we are Life's!* To recognize and accept this puts us in a different position: we will no longer pit ourselves against life, but will accept the way things are and align ourselves more closely with reality; our efforts will thereafter not be spent in struggling against the inevitable, but in working in co-operation with what cannot be changed. Needless to say, this requires wisdom, and not just a complacent acceptance of things. We must have wisdom to know what can and what cannot be changed. Meditation yields insight into the realities of life.

When we are very interested in something it is easy for the mind to stay focussed, whereas if we are not interested, the mind easily strays. This is the key we need: *interest.* Most of us are only superficially interested—if at all—in finding out what is true; because of this, we jump around like grasshoppers, from one teacher to another, from this method to that, and get very little for our efforts; we look outside of ourselves, and expect others to provide

answers for us, to tell us what to do—in other words: to think for us. But how can this be?

Below is a picture of the Buddha preaching His first sermon to the five ascetics or yogis in the Deer Park at Sarnath, near Benares in northern India; it is a very illustrative picture, and much might be learned from it.

The yogis are not all sitting in the same meditation posture, like statues, but are relaxed—*relaxed,* but at the same time, attentive. They would not have been thinking of the past, of the future, or even of the present; nor would they have been thinking of or practicing meditation. They would have *been* in the present, would have *been* in meditation, and the meditation they were in would have no center and no circumference. I feel quite confident that most people have, at times, experienced this kind of unproduced meditation, even if they did not recognize it as such.

As the Buddha spoke about the Four Noble Truths, one of the yogis—*Kondanya*, by name—understood, and the Buddha could see it, not just with His mental powers but with His normal vision, because when someone under-

stands deeply and clearly, it shows on his face (I have seen it once, and it is a most remarkable and unforgettable sight, like a light shining outwards). He said: “Kondanya has understood! Kondanya has understood!” During the following days, the other yogis also became enlightened through listening to the Buddha speak.

If we, by reason or effort, cannot reach Enlightenment, it *is* within our capacity to develop interest in life, in Dharma, to become more sensitive and receptive, to open the doors of our hearts and minds, to be watchful and alert. It *is* possible. Reality is all around and within us, never absent for a moment.

SKILLFUL MEANS

DURING MY TRAVELS, I have met many narrow-minded and sectarian Buddhists, people who consider their particular sect or school of Buddhism the only right one, and all others wrong, or only partially right, which is the nature of sectarianism universally. Some time ago, I heard of a 'teacher' in Hawaii who draws followers to him by hinting that he is enlightened, and claims he is propagating 'original Buddhism', thereby implying that other forms of Buddhism, or ways taught by others, are not. To me, this smells strongly of egoism, and immediately repels me; it sounds as if such an 'enlightened teacher' is trying to sell something, like a hawker in the market!

This kind of thing is unfortunately not uncommon. In this age of confusion, when gullible people are grasping at straws, 'Living Buddhas' are springing up like mushrooms! And the large numbers of people who follow them blindly should not be taken as an endorsement of their authenticity, because the masses of people—and I know, as I write this, that I might be accused of being conceited and an elitist for saying it, but I'll still say it—are just like sheep, with little ability to think for themselves, and will follow anyone who comes along promising something extraordinary, without the need to do very much for themselves. Many people are more than ready to throw themselves at the feet of anyone who will relieve them of the tedious responsibility of thinking for themselves; far from considering it a loss, they look upon it as a liberation, and are happy to give it up—as obviously were the 900-plus fanatical followers of Jim Jones and his 'People's Temple' cult who obeyed his instructions and committed mass suicide by drinking cyanide some years ago.

For the past few years, there's been a new meteor in the sky of the expatriate Vietnamese Buddhists—a supposed-to-be nun who makes fantastic claims and promises, and sweeps crowds of empty-heads off their feet, to such

an extent that some of them are said to have put her shoes and socks on their altars as objects of worship! Some are reported to have stood down-stream from where she was bathing, and drunk the water that had flowed past her 'holy body'! So spiritually poor and lost are they that they imbibe her words like nectar, without question. And, not only does she claim to be enlightened, but to be on a higher level than the Buddha Himself, as she says that Gotama Buddha died a long time ago, while she is alive now; she therefore exhorts people to follow her rather than the 'dead Buddha,' because she is a 'Living Buddha,' right here and now! And if people dare to reject her claims and criticize her, she pronounces dire punishments on them! She draws sustenance from her ignorant followers, without whom, she would be nothing. Alas, the world is full of people who are unable or unwilling to think for themselves, and who want someone to think and live for them; it has always been like this, and maybe always will be.

The monk who ordained me, and who I used to call 'teacher,' although very kind, calm and peaceful, was quite sectarian, which was what led me to part company with him. He was not entirely to blame for this, however, as, being Thai, he was a product of that particular system—a system that has introverted and isolated itself, and refuses to accept that there might be ways other than *Theravada* Buddhism. If invited to a Buddhist gathering where there would be monks of other sects, he declined to go, saying: "*Mahayana* is not the teaching of the Buddha."

I came across a little joke recently that highlights the hatred that sectarianism engenders; I will repeat it here:

"I was walking across a bridge one day, and saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off, so I ran over and said: 'Stop! Don't do it!'

"He said: 'Why shouldn't I?'

"I said: 'Well, there's so much to live for!'

"He said: 'Like what?'

"I said: 'Well, are you religious, or atheist?'

"He said: 'Religious.'

"I said: 'Me too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?'

"He said: 'Christian.'

"I said: 'Me too! Catholic or Protestant?'

"He said: 'Protestant.'

"I said: 'Me too! Lutheran or Baptist?'

"He said: 'Baptist.'

"I said: 'Wow, me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?'

"He said: 'Baptist Church of God.'

"I said: 'Me too! Are you *Original* Baptist Church of God or *Reformed* Baptist Church of God?'

"He said: 'Reformed Baptist Church of God.'

"I said: 'Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, *Reformation* of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, *Reformation* of 1915?'

"He said: 'Reformed Baptist Church of God, *Reformation* of 1915.'

"I said: 'Die, heretic scum!' and pushed him off."

I've often come across this attitude, with people claiming to follow Theravada disparaging people claiming to follow Mahayana as having deviated from the Buddha's Way (similar to how Protestants and Catholics accuse and revile each other, though Buddhists have never been violent about it). On the other hand, some who claim to follow Mahayana look down on Theravadins as selfish, and label them '*Hinayanists,*' or followers of the *Hinayana* or Small Vehicle, in contradistinction to the Mahayana, which means Great Vehicle, as if they themselves have already passed that stage! Many Buddhists polarize themselves between these standpoints, and lock themselves into a certain position, becoming narrow in their outlook. But there is another way, a neutral way of looking at things, taking into account the Buddhist use of 'skillful means' or 'techniques,' whereby teachings are seen as means, not as ends in themselves. By taking sectarian standpoints, we see the means as the end, we mistake the finger that points at the

moon for the moon itself, and get stuck on a sandbank in the river!

Many Theravadins reject scriptures which are not of the Pali Canon, saying they are not the Buddha's words, and were written much later—in other words, they are interpolations. To me, it is not very important whether they are the Buddha's words or not—and I presume that anyone who has read through my book this far might also feel the same way, as my words are not the Buddha's words, but you are still reading them. What is important is to see if they are helpful to us or not on our spiritual path; if they are, they may be regarded as the Buddha's words, even if He never said them; Truth is no-one's monopoly. And these words are attributed to the Buddha: "If you find truth in any other religion, accept it."

If we are to understand what the Buddha taught, we must understand why He taught. If we understand why He taught, we shall be able to see the Dharma all around us, and in the teachings of other religions, too. We should not be bigoted and refuse to see what is here, but open and receptive. Dharma is not something localized and exclusive, but all-embracing. Ultimately, we shall see Dharma not merely *in* everything, but *as* everything; there is nothing outside it, and we can't get away from it. *Universal Dharma* is far beyond sectarian Buddhism, far beyond the limitations of name-and-form, but we have grown so used to things coming 'pre-packaged' that the form is often considered more important than the essence. Having come this far, is that all we want from Buddhism—mere name-and-form? Is that all we bring to it, or reduce it to? Are we content to find a temporary and tiny identity within it such as a sectarian name provides? Or do we wish to experience something of what the Buddha discovered beneath the Bodhi-tree and which He thereafter set out to try to indicate to the world—that which takes us beyond dualistic thoughts of 'I and you,' 'self and others,' 'us and them'?

Facing facts, we must realize that we are *this* side of Enlightenment, and wishing and hoping will not take us to the *other* side. We may, however, try to put self aside in our dealings and contacts with others, try to keep Dharma at the center, to remind ourselves that right and wrong are *not* people—"*I* am right and *you* are wrong" kind-of-thing—but changing perceptions or points of view.

When the Buddha attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi-tree, He was at first hesitant to leave the forest and go out to teach, and thought: "What I have found is very subtle, and hard to comprehend by people who are sunk in the mud of ignorance. If I try to teach, who will understand? It will only be needlessly troublesome for me. It is better that I remain alone in the forest and live peacefully until I die." But the voice of Compassion spoke to Him from deep within His mind, and said: "There are some beings with just a little dust of ignorance in their eyes, who, if they hear the Dharma, will understand, but if not hearing it, will fall away and be lost." (It is otherwise stated that a powerful deity, aware of the Buddha's initial intention not to preach, spoke to Him in this way: "O Blessed One, there are some with just a little dust in their eyes, who, hearing the Dharma, will understand and accept, but hearing not, will fall away. Have compassion, Lord, and preach the Dharma! Let the Blessed One turn the Wheel of the Law for the sake of beings in ignorance!") Personally, I do not accept the latter explanation as it implies that deities or gods are more enlightened than Buddhas, which Buddhism denies. But it is not very important whether the voice came from within or without, and we need not waste time debating about it, as it cannot be definitely concluded; it is enough that it caused the Buddha to go out and preach, wandering around the Ganges valley for forty-five years, never considering, for a moment, His own comfort or convenience, teaching anyone who was ready and willing to learn, according to their level of understanding.

So, it is clear why the Buddha taught: out of compassion for the world. His Enlightenment was not for Himself alone, but had to be shared with others, and we still share it today, 2500 years later, in the form of His Teachings. His purpose was to lead people on to Awakening, and sometimes He used tricks for this, as in the case of His step-brother, Prince *Nanda*, who was about to get married. The Buddha persuaded him to become a monk instead, and when Nanda found little joy in the monk's life, the Buddha further tricked him until he finally became Enlightened.

Such tricks and 'cheatings' are entirely legitimate and permissible when used for the benefit of others, unlike the tricks of the world, which are used for self-gain and the detriment of others. In using Dharma-tricks, therefore, we must be certain that we are using them as skillful means to lead others to understanding.

Although, in some ways, there is a lot of freedom in the West, there is also a lot of fear, tension and suspicion, and daily living, in many places, has become precarious. It seems to be taboo to make eye-contact with strangers, and people fear to look others in the eye. Rather than be accused or suspected of staring, people wear cold and distant masks. This, of course, has a spiral-effect, and causes the space between us to become ever wider.

Tired of seeing gloomy, unsmiling faces every day, a San Francisco bus-driver decided to do something about it. So, when people boarded his bus and tendered their fare to him, he said to them: "No smiling, please. Smiling not allowed on this bus!" Of course, this had the hoped-for effect, and people started to smile. When the bus stopped for more passengers, those already in the bus all watched the odd scene, knowing what was about to happen. Soon, many of the people in the bus were smiling and talking to each other; they had discovered something in common. The bus-driver had used a skillful means to wake them up.

All Buddhists accept the Bodhisattva-ideal as the highest, as a Bodhisattva is a Buddha-to-be, and a Buddha is

one who discovers the Dharma when it has been lost and forgotten, and reveals it to those capable of understanding. A Buddha has been a Bodhisattva; a Bodhisattva will be a Buddha. Buddhists also believe that everyone has the innate capacity to become Buddhas, but that it is not necessary, as we can reach Enlightenment on a lower level; the only difference is in the degree of capacity to help others.

Let me ask a question here: Does a Bodhisattva know he is a Bodhisattva? Well, taking Gotama Buddha as an example—the *only* example that *all* Buddhists will accept—I would say 'No,' for, according to the story of Prince Siddhartha that has come down to us, he seemed unaware of being a Bodhisattva, although he was without doubt, a very special person from birth. He was raised according to his rank, trained in the martial arts a warrior had to know, was pampered and served, married and knew the joys of sharing his life with a beautiful and devoted wife. But in spite of all this, he felt dissatisfied; like molten rock forcing its way to the surface of the Earth by the line of least resistance, his destiny could not be averted, and finally caused him to leave the palace and wander off into the forest in search of truth. The force was there, and although he undoubtedly felt it, he was not aware of his status as a Bodhisattva until, *after* His Enlightenment, when He became a Buddha, He looked back on the way He had come.

So, if a Bodhisattva would not recognize himself as such, how could we possibly recognize one? Surely, such a person would not float around on an giant lotus-flower, with a bright halo, or announce: "Hey, everyone, look at me! I'm a Bodhisattva!" He/she would probably work quietly and unknown in some corner of the world, not making a show, but content to do what he could to help others. If someone recognized his merit, and tried to display him, like some kind of circus-freak or E.T., he might smile shyly—or grin like an idiot—and refuse to go along with them, or maybe just melt away into the crowd. Bodhisattvas, to my understanding—or maybe I should say, imagination, as I

have not knowingly met any—are people who live in this world, but who outwardly look not very different than you or me. (I was once taken to meet a woman in Kuala Lumpur, who—I was told—claimed to have been a monk at the time of the Buddha, when, had he wished, could have become enlightened at the level of Arahant,[1] but who chose, instead, to take the path of the Bodhisattva, and eventually become a Buddha. I must confess that I was—and still am—skeptical about her claim).

Personally, I regard the division of Buddhism into various sects as childish and silly, and refuse to wear any of the labels people try to stick on me. It has happened in the past that people, observing my appearance, have asked if I follow Theravada or Mahayana. Sometimes, I answer this question with another question that has no meaning at all except to wake people up: "Did the Buddha follow Theravada or Mahayana?"

Many of our problems would instantly disappear if we discarded sectarian names and focussed upon Universal Dharma instead. No name—including Buddhism, or even Dharma—is adequate to describe what we are looking for. Names often become traps, and prevent us going further.

Many Buddhists believe in 'The Pure Land' or 'The Western Paradise' of *Amitabha* Buddha, which is supposed to be 84,000 miles away to the West. They also believe that if they piously recite the name of Amitabha, when they die, they will be reborn there, from whence it is very easy to attain Enlightenment, or Nirvana. This is rather simplistic, and in direct contrast to what the Buddha said about Karma —how nobody can save another, but each must work out his own salvation by and for himself; it seems more Christian than Christianity, except for the damnation part of that

[1] (An 'Arahant' is someone who has attained Enlightenment—Nirvana—by following the Teachings of a Buddha).

religion, which teaches that only through total acceptance of Jesus as one's personal savior can one be 'saved' and go to Heaven; according to many Christians, all those who do not accept Jesus are doomed to suffer in Hell forever. Well, they are entitled to their beliefs, as long as they do not interfere with others; if they want to believe that, it's okay with me. I consider myself 'saved'—saved *from* such beliefs rather than saved *by* them!

Belief in Amitabha and His Pure Land has long been a sore point between Buddhists of different sects—as has the belief in Mary among Christians. Clinging to their beliefs, some Buddhists get quite upset about it. Personally, I like the explanation of Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Ch'an (Zen) school in China. He resolved the matter succinctly by looking at it in a different way. In *The Platform Sutra*—otherwise known as *The Sutra of Hui Neng*—he said that the Pure Land is not 84,000 miles away to the West, as was widely believed, but 84,000 wrong thoughts away in the mind, and that by overcoming these wrong thoughts, the Pure Land would be revealed. Unless we can find out by our own experience, however, it belongs in the realm of belief and speculation, and I do not want to venture into such a quagmire, preferring to stay with facts, in the spirit of the *Kalama Sutta*, which exhorts us to find out for ourselves, and not to blindly accept the words of others. Zen urges us "not to depend upon words and letters," and stresses "a direct seeing into the heart of man, seeing into one's own nature, and the attainment of Enlightenment."

On the other hand, a genuine humbling of oneself is always good, and is the purpose of Buddhist devotional practices: to put down the ego, and humble oneself. The act of bowing, and touching the floor with one's head, is an act of humility. In some cultures, like the Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese, people would be offended if someone touched their heads, because they consider the head to be the seat of the mind, spirit or soul. So, to willingly bow one's head to the floor before another person or an image is to pay re-

spect, humbly, to that person or symbol, in recognition of superior qualities. And the way Buddhists bow to Buddha-images is not done from fear, or in hope of getting anything in return—or should not be, anyway, if they understand—but from respect towards the *'Maha Muni,'* the Great Sage, the One Who showed the Way, by following which we can benefit so much; He is therefore, worthy of veneration, even in the form of images and pictures.

Of course, the ego being what it is—always ready to play tricks and turn things around to its own advantage—we must take care not to fall into the trap of becoming proud of being humble, otherwise we might become like Uriah Heep, a character in Charles Dickens' novel, *David Copperfield*, who, though scheming, obsequious, ambitious and ruthless, wore an ingratiating smile, and used to say: "I'm so 'umble; I'm so very 'umble."

If we are to make progress in the Way, we must know not only the good and the right, but also the bad and the wrong. If we do not know the bad and the wrong as such, how shall we avoid them?

When learning another language, many people learn the bad words—the *swear* words—of that language first. There are exceptions, and I, as a monk, am one, because no-one tells me the swear-words, and it was only by chance that I learned some such words in Thai and Vietnamese; I don't know any in Chinese, Filipino or Malay, for example, though I do speak some of those languages; nor do I want to know. My point here is that even if we know the bad words, it doesn't mean we have to use them, does it? We choose to use or not use them.

However, while we must be able to distinguish good from bad and right from wrong, we must be careful not to get stuck on these relative terms. I might say you are a good person, and you might say I am, but if you say you are good, or I say I am good, are we good? We *might* be good, but we could not talk about it, even if we were aware of it, which we would probably not be. And, in the same

way, although a person might follow the Mahayana—that is, the Way of the Bodhisattva—he could not say that he does, for that would be tantamount to saying he is a good person. Immediately he were to say he follows the Mahayana, he would fall off. This is why it is called the 'Razor-edged Path.' So, we can say nothing about something that can only be done. From this, it can easily be seen that many so-called 'Mahayanists' would soon be disqualified. We may follow, but we cannot/must not talk about it.

Keeping in mind that we are not yet enlightened, we should not be narrow-minded and approach life with minds already made up about it, but should be prepared to make use of anything that might help us to become better people.

DREAM COME TRUE

I made my first airplane flight in 1967, from Amman in Jordan to London, just before the outbreak of the Six-Days' War between Israel and its neighbors. I was young then, and like most young people, played it cool, as if I'd been flying all my life, so I didn't allow myself to enjoy the flight much. It was 3½ years more before my next flight, from India to Australia. Since then, I have flown a great deal, but never enjoyed it as I might, as I was always afraid something might happen and the plane would crash, especially when we encountered air-turbulence—and I have been through some rough patches, when I thought the wings would snap off. Flight-attendant friends of mine assured me that this was highly unlikely, but my fear persisted.

Not long ago, therefore, I was pleased to receive a letter from a friend, who experienced the same nervousness about flying, but who had a breakthrough in his way of looking at it. For the sake of others who might have the same fear—and apparently, they are not few—I will reproduce his letter here. Nor is it for just such people, but for those with any kind of irrational fear that makes them suffer needlessly.

"This little story I would like to share with you is about flying.

"I have been on airplanes many, many times. I fly on a regular basis, but continue to 'hate' flying. It scares me.

"While on board, I say to myself, what if one engine stops? What if *all* of them stop? What if a wing catches fire? What if the plane is not properly maintained? What if just one little bolt snaps? What if the plane crashes? How can I put my life at the mercy of a mindless machine?

"On my last trip from Los Angeles to Sydney a month ago (I have done this trip several times before), I reflected that the plane has to cross the entire Pacific Ocean with virtually no place to land if anything goes wrong. What if the plane loses fuel and needs to land? Where would it land? What if I die here?

"Then, and every other time, I sit back and think that I should never fear death. Death is inevitable. After all, flying is the safest mode of transport. If 'my time is up,' I would face death anywhere, even in the safety of my bedroom. There is insecurity everywhere. Volcanoes and earth-quakes may happen. A lunatic could approach me and kill me on the street. I will only get what my Karma sets forth for me. There is no escape, and there is nothing to fear.

"Those "logical" moments of thinking quell my fears and make me relax.

"Ironically, as a kid, I always dreamed of flying. I would watch birds with envy. I would look up at airplanes and think how lucky were the passengers on board. How privileged they were to be able to see coastlines, clouds from above, and real maps which I could only see in books. How wonderful it would be to feel that one can actually defy gravity and fly like a bird! I couldn't wait for the opportunity to fly. I was lucky enough to be in Lebanon, a land of many mountains and glorious cliffs. I would often climb to a high point, look down, and pretend I was flying. I even tried to build flying machines, but they got me nowhere higher than the ground.

"Unfortunately, the dream of the child was replaced by the fear of the adult. When I boarded a plane for the first time, I was 24 years old. I was a neurotic and paranoid survivor of a ravaging civil war. I was a fearful creature. Fear arose in me every time I flew.

"Whenever I flew, I invariably looked out the window, saw what was underneath me, enjoyed the view, and

wished I could see with the eyes of the child who has died within me. The little joy I occasionally got from flying was always overwhelmed with a much stronger sensation of fear—even if I suppressed my fear with the delusive effect of alcohol.

"Today, I flew from Sydney to Emerald (Queensland). I had to stop over in Brisbane to change planes. As soon as I boarded the plane in Sydney, the same fear came back to me; I wasn't surprised. I started to wriggle, worry about every bump, and wished to get there as soon as possible. When we reached Brisbane, the wind was fairly strong. The landing was rough. I was very nervous.

"When I boarded the little twin-propeller plane to Emerald, I had a window seat. The trip was rougher. I was even more nervous. I played the song of calmness as I normally do, reminding myself that there is nothing I could do and that whatever happens happens and there is no need to fear anything. It worked as usual.

"Looking out the window, I remembered some words about the present—the very precious moment of the present that we normally overlook. I was not thinking of flying at all then. I was only remembering the words. At that moment, I realized that I was only suppressing my fear about the unlikely event of a plane crash. The calm I thought I had was nothing more than a fool's paradise. Even though I managed to suppress this fear, I thought, I was still unable to enjoy the moment I am experiencing now; the present.

"As soon as I awakened to this fact, I looked at the beauty of the scenery outside as it was then, in that very moment; without having to wonder and ponder as to what could happen next. I immediately jumped inwardly and realized that *I AM FLYING!* I am above the clouds! What a wonderful view it is. What magnificent technology man has developed to allow me to see this. I am indeed flying, and I love it.

"Every new moment brought new scenery. The bumps turned into gentle rocks of a cradle, an adventure ride. I was flying with the clouds. I saw mountaintops. I saw towns like little models. *I am finally flying!!!* For a few minutes, I was totally oblivious to the future and what it might bring. It didn't seem to exist (does it ever before it actually happens?). I was just simply enjoying the present moment(s) and the joy they brought to me. My childhood dream had come true.

"Do we ignore the present because we are unable to catch and possess it? I wonder."

FEAR

"Every kind of fear grows worse by not being looked at. The effort of turning away one's thoughts (like the ostrich with its head in the sand), is a tribute to the horribleness of the specter from which one is averting one's gaze; the proper course with every kind of fear is to think about it rationally and calmly, but with great concentration, until it becomes completely familiar. In the end, familiarity will blunt its terrors; the whole subject will become boring, and our thoughts will turn away from it, not, as formerly, by an effort of will, but through mere lack of interest in the topic. When you find yourself inclined to brood on anything, no matter what, the best plan always is to think about it even more than you naturally would, until at last its morbid fascination is worn off".

Bertrand Russell).

WHO KNOWS?

No-one knows everything.
No-one knows nothing.
Everyone knows something.

BROUGHT UP AS A CHRISTIAN, I later rejected Christianity, with its fanciful myths, but I did not, and will not, accept Buddhist myths as a substitute.

In the 1850's, Charles Darwin caused a furor in the West by his book, "On The Origin of Species," which contradicted the teachings of Christianity about Mankind's origins, and traced it back to apes instead. Predictably, the Christian Church vehemently denounced his theories, but his book initiated a widespread search for the life-form that would prove humans are descended from apes. Fired with the idea of finding the 'Missing Link,' hopeful explorers set off into the jungles of Africa and Asia, and though they didn't find what they sought, their search inspired the story of Tarzan, the Ape-man, which has thrilled generations of children and which continues to enthrall us in the movies.

We must recall that 150 years ago, the Western sciences of anthropology, biology, archaeology and geology were still in their infancy; most Westerners still believed the biblical doctrine of Creation. Darwin challenged this, and it is hardly surprising he was maligned; but he was soon vindicated and his courage and sincerity in exposing myths that had held sway over people's lives for almost 2,000 years acknowledged. His theory, however—though it gave rise to numerous lines of research and investigation that have yielded tremendous results since—remains a hypothesis; it has not been conclusively proved that humans are descended from apes.

After his bombshell-disclosures, fossils and skeletal-remains began to turn up in great numbers. Though not new and unknown, no-one had realized just how old these bones were (in line with ancient belief in dragons, the Chi-

nese called them 'dragon-bones'). After Darwin, not only were they correctly identified, but human-bones of various types—Neanderthal, Peking, Java, Cro-Magnon, and so on—indicated a process of evolution covering millions of years, proving that early humans were quite different from the humans of today. We are still unsure about the origins of the human race, but are convinced it goes back at least 5 million years—somewhat at variance with the few thousand years claimed by the Jewish-Christian Bible.

Buddhism, like all religions, has its myths about the origins of life on Earth, but Buddhists are enjoined to investigate things for themselves rather than simply believe; if we find that things do not agree with reason or experience, we are not obliged to accept them.

The Buddhist scriptures say that there were many Buddhas before the historical Gotama Buddha, but we can neither prove nor disprove this. As far as we know, however, Gotama Buddha never claimed to be unique, and showed the way to attain Buddhahood to those who would make the needed effort. It is also said that attainment of Buddhahood is very difficult, and consequently very rare, and that, moreover, no-one can reach that stage while the teachings of the previous Buddha are still known, though why this should be, I do not know. Oh, the Buddhist scriptures have an explanation for it, but that doesn't make it true; there has been plenty of time and opportunity, over the 2500 years and more since Gotama Buddha passed away, to tamper with the scriptures, and we would be quite naive as to suppose that what we find in the books today is exactly what the Buddha said! Dare we suppose that the Buddhist scriptures are error-free when it is said now, by some scholars of the Christian Bible, that there are over 170,000 errors in that book?!

If it is true that a person cannot attain Buddhahood until the teachings of the previous Buddha have disappeared and been succeeded by a immense period of darkness, during which nothing is known about Dharma, and if there

have been as many Buddhas before Gotama as the scriptures claim—28 in one series, innumerable according to other accounts—this would take us back not just millions of years, but billions, when life on Earth was just a matter of slime! How are we to understand the claims of the scriptures regarding previous Buddhas? Even if we consider the evidence of science regarding early humans, that takes us back only 5 or 6 million years, and what could a Buddha have done with the people of those times? Gotama Buddha Himself had doubts about going out to teach, thinking that people, stuck in the mud of ignorance, would be unable to understand. And if people of India at that time would have found it difficult to understand, how much moreso would primitive humans, lacking language and the skills of communication, have been able to? Were there Buddhas, living and teaching among our early ancestors— 'cave-Buddhas' among cave-men? Maybe, but I'm not going to lose any sleep over it, just as I'm not about to accept everything that is written in the scriptures.

There are two parts to Buddhism: the part of the Past, and the part of the Eternal Present. The part of the Past includes the life-story of the Buddha and all the myths that have grown up around it; we cannot verify this part, or if we can, in some way, it will only be personal verification, and would not permit us to reveal it to others so that they would know, too. But the part of the Eternal Present is something we can all verify and experience for ourselves: the heart of the Buddha's Teachings—that is, what He discovered under the Bodhi-tree and thereafter tried to share with others. This part is not a matter of belief or opinion, as is the part of the Past, but of direct experience by the individual, and of much greater importance.

Who, today, takes literally the Jataka Tales (stories of the previous lives of the Bodhisattva who eventually became Gotama Buddha), tales that depict him as a deer, elephant, monkey, rabbit, and so on? These are teaching-stories or parables, like those of Aesop. The lessons they

embody are good and easily understood by anyone, no matter what their level of education, but they should not be taken literally. Animals can speak human languages only in the cartoons, like Bugs Bunny or Donald Duck!

Many Buddhists believe the Buddha knew everything, but this was not so. He knew the important things about life, the things that do not change, the eternal verities. If He came today, there are many things that we would be able to teach Him: how to use the telephone, how to operate a computer, how to drive a car, etc.; He would not automatically know these things, though He could probably soon learn. We know lots of things that He didn't know, and He knew lots of things that we don't know and are in need of learning, which is why He is still our Teacher.

Averse to, or unwilling to accept criticism when their faults or errors are pointed out, some people retort: "Huh, I can't do anything right!" but this is just as incorrect as the egoistic feeling that one can't do anything wrong; in fact, it amounts to the same thing, for what people mean when they say, "I can't do anything right," is they can't do anything wrong—so they think—and are above criticism. How dare you criticize me?!

We commonly hear people say of others: "They don't know anything!" In the ebullience of youth, out of ignorance and frustration, kids say this about their parents. Newly aware of and excited by the ocean of information available, youngsters often think they know everything. Well, surely, there are many things today that young people know and older people don't and probably never will know; this is always so and as it should be, and means that we are growing and learning, and not stagnating; moreover, it is a tribute to older people, as their generation provided the basis for the arising of new knowledge and information, just as people who lived before them made things available to them that they themselves didn't have or know. We should all recognize and acknowledge this; we have inherited

most of what we have from others before us; we didn't invent or make it ourselves.

It is perhaps necessary and understandable for young people to feel that they know much more than they do, for without this feeling, it would be very difficult for them to go forwards confidently (there is something useful about ignorance after all; if I'd known what was ahead of me before I set out on my travels, I doubt if I'd have gone; I would have been too scared!), and hopefully reach a point where they realize they don't know much at all, and can learn to say, without shame or fear: "I don't know." This is not the same as the mindless "I dunno!" response of many young people today, if asked about anything that requires a little use of their gray matter. Of course, the ability to recognize one's ignorance doesn't always come as we grow older—in fact, it never comes to some of us—sometimes it comes when we are young, and oh, how wonderful for this realization to be combined with the vigor and energy of youth!—just as wonderful, in fact, as it is sad to see young people without vision, purpose, understanding and tolerance.

I am not overjoyed about the prospect of growing old, though I know it will happen if I do not die earlier; old age is attended by many troubles and disabilities. But I would not like to be young again, just as I was then. If only youth, with its beauty and vigor, came at the end of our lives instead of the beginning! Youth is often wasted on the young!

No-one is ever completely honest or open with another; there are always things withheld, secrets concealed. It is a mistake, therefore, to think that one knows another person well—especially when one does not even know oneself. To learn requires humility.

NAME-AND-FORM

ALTHOUGH IT IS a trivial thing to write about, it obviously affected some people quite strongly, so maybe it is time I did so. It concerns my change of monastic robes, from one style to another, back in 1976. Telling of it might help someone see how easily we get stuck on outward appearances and fail to penetrate deeper, and serve as an example of what to avoid—or at least, what to be aware of.

I was ordained in 1972, in Penang, by Thai monks, according to the Theravada tradition. Soon after, my visa expiring, I left Malaysia and went to Thailand, where I tried to conform to the type of Buddhism that prevails there. But I was soon disillusioned, as I found it narrow and moribund, long ago having become a thing of mere tradition and not a thing to live by; it is what I now term 'ethnic Buddhism' and is more a thing of local culture than a spiritual way. Of course, there *are* Buddhists in Thailand who understand and live by the Dharma, but they are relatively few. And as for Thailand being a 'Buddhist country,' that is a myth and not true at all; there *are* Buddhists in Thailand, but Thailand is *not* a Buddhist country; if it were, we would have a hard time explaining why corruption and crime in many forms flourish there. Thailand is no more a Buddhist country than America is a Christian country!

Having seen something of Universal Dharma before becoming a monk, or even before becoming a Buddhist, I felt stifled by the hierarchical and ecclesiastical structure of ethnic Buddhism in Thailand (and later by forms of ethnic Buddhism in other countries), and returned to Malaysia in 1973 to begin the missionary work that continues until now (and yes, there *is* such in Buddhism, too; in fact, Buddhism was a missionary religion from its inception, five hundred years before Jesus of Nazareth was born; but it used reason and gentle methods rather than violence, threats and

bribery, as other religions have done). I spent the second half of 1973 in the small town of Taiping.

Over the next several years, seeing and hearing how Buddhism had become a means of business to exploit gullible people by such things as chanting, fortune-telling, charms, amulets, and so on—especially by some Thai monks (although they were by no means the only ones), I became disillusioned with Theravada Buddhism in practice, although the doctrines of that particular school—which might better be termed 'Pali Buddhism,' from the Pali language of its scriptures—I still regard as basically sound and clear, and I decided to break away.

So, in 1976, I approached the ranking Chinese monk in Singapore, the late Venerable Hong Choon, and explained to him—through a translator, of course, as he spoke no English and I no Chinese—how I felt. I said I found it hard to propagate the Dharma in Theravada robes with the reputation of some—and to be fair, I must stress the word *some*—but not all, Thai monks in that part of the world, to contend with; many people have a negative impression of them, I said, and think of them as practicing 'black-magic.' Also, vegetarianism is important to me, and in Theravada robes it is sometimes difficult to explain about this, as most Theravada monks are meat-eaters. Therefore, I said to the Venerable, I would like to take Chinese monks' robes, but that I did not want to be a Mahayana monk, any more than I wanted to be a Theravada monk. I don't know if he really understood what I meant, but he said to me that as long as I am vegetarian (something that was very important to him), and propagate the Dharma, it was alright with him. On that basis, therefore, I took Chinese robes, which I have worn ever since. Usually, however, when I give a Dharma-talk, I wear the Theravada outer robe over the Chinese tunic and pants, so that people will find it hard to categorize me as either this or that.

Wearing Chinese robes, I returned to Taiping, and there and in other places where I'd stayed before, some people were somewhat upset and disappointed with me, as if I had betrayed them. Their reaction was quite surprising, as I had changed only the form; my ideas were basically the same as before, as most people who have known me a long time would probably affirm. They had staked quite a lot in the name-and-form of Theravada Buddhism, and without waiting to listen to my reasons for my change of form, regarded me as a traitor to their cause. Well, I have no regrets about changing, and if they could/can see no further than the outer appearance, that is *their* problem, not mine.

Over the years, I observed that Mahayana monks are more tolerant of their Theravada counterparts, and welcome them to stay in their temples and monasteries, while the converse is seldom so. I have spent most of my time since 1976, therefore, in Mahayana temples, where conditions are more conducive to me.

After my change of dress, someone advised me not to visit the monk who had ordained me in Penang, as—he said—he wouldn't be happy. "Why not?" I said; "I've done nothing wrong by changing." So I went to see him and paid my respects. True, he wasn't very pleased at my appearance, but neither was he displeased; he only remarked upon me wearing pants rather than a sarong.

I did not see him again for many years, and now he is no longer a monk. Why he disrobed I do not know, nor do I care, but I *do* know that he got a lot of trouble from certain people at the Meditation Center that he was instrumental in establishing in Penang; they showed their gratitude to him by making things hard for him. Anyway, I had wanted to see him again for many years, as I still respected him and was grateful to him for his kindness and assistance to me when I needed it. So, finally, in 1994, when I was in Kuala Lumpur, I learned that he was there, too, and went to see him. I found him little changed since I last saw him seventeen years before, except that he was no longer in monks'

robes. Our meeting was quite cordial, and I was happy to see him again, just as I was to see my old primary-school teacher in England some years earlier. If he was again unable to resist saying something about my dress it was probably because of his being insularly Thai. I replied that it is not important, being both impermanent and non-self. For my part, I made no mention about *his* change of dress. He did not ask me to speak at the center where he gives instruction in meditation, but I was neither surprised nor disappointed by that.

Why are we so attached to appearances? If, by wearing a certain kind of dress one could become enlightened, we could dress monkeys in such clothes and expect enlightenment of them! Alas, how can we avoid disappointment like this? It is worth thinking about how the Buddha might have been dressed when He attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi-tree. We don't know how He looked, of course, but it is unlikely He was wearing the kind of robes that Theravada monks now wear; He was probably clad in rags, and very lightly clad, at that!

So, what is the purpose of robes anyway? Is this not a valid question? We have just debunked the idea that merely by wearing robes one becomes automatically enlightened, so what *is* the purpose? Do they necessarily make one better than people who do not wear robes? Again, no. Then?

BE PREPARED

AMONG MY OLD NOTES, I came across something I had kept for years; I don't recall where I got it, and it is marked 'anonymous,' so I cannot, as I otherwise would, acknowledge its author. Reading through it, I felt inspired—which must have been the reason I kept it in the first place—and so it has finally become useful, and keeping it, squirrel-like, for so long, has been justified. Here it is:

"Human life is a struggle—against frustration, ignorance, suffering, evil, and the maddening inertia of things in general; but it is also a struggle *for* something, and for something which our experience tells us can be achieved in some measure, even if we find ourselves personally debarred from any measure that seems just or reasonable. And *fulfillment* seems to describe better than any other single word, the positive side of human development and human evolution—the realization of inherent capacities by the individual, and of new possibilities by the race; the satisfaction-needs, spiritual as well as material; the emergence of new qualities of experience to be enjoyed, and the building of personalities. But it cannot be achieved without struggle, not merely struggle with external obstacles, but with the enemies within ourselves".

If we were to look on life as an often-difficult adventure—instead of complaining about it and wishing it were always easy-going—it would be much more in line with reality, and we would get far more out of it in terms of experience and satisfaction; moreover, we'd have much more energy than we do. The problem is, we do not understand life—and here, I mean the basic laws of life, not the lifestyles we have developed—and constantly wish it to be otherwise; such wishing is also a kind of struggle, but it is

futile, and only drains us of energy for no good purpose, like as if, our house on fire, we were to stand there looking at it miserably, and complaining that it's not fair, instead of trying to put out the fire and/or calling the fire-brigade. If we must struggle in life—and it certainly seems we must—we should know something of the nature of what we are struggling against. For example, if we were in a small boat on a swiftly-flowing river, we might let ourselves be carried along by the stream, hoping not to be swept onto rocks or sandbars or into whirlpools, or we could try to guide it through the dangerous parts by using oars or paddles; it would not be much use praying to God or whoever/whatever else to guide the boat and keep us safe while we sit back and relax or cower in terror, expecting everything to be taken care of. Life requires effort, if not always physical, then mental and emotional effort; and if we expect this to be so, we may be somewhat prepared for our journey through it.

Caught up in our hectic lifestyles, many of us feel impotent, and easily give way to frustration and depression; not surprisingly, it has come to be known as 'the rat-race.' Our lives are full of wonderful things that provide ease, enjoyment and entertainment, but we have become surfeited thereby, and succumbed to the disease of boredom, to the extent that many of us see no meaning in life. The Earth has been explored and almost all of it mapped; the seas have been charted, the mountains climbed, the jungles searched, the deserts crossed. And, since most of us have little chance of personally going into Space to extend our frontiers there, or deep into the seas to plumb its mysteries, perhaps we think there is little more to be discovered now, and so it is easy for us to lapse into lethargy, become jaded, and just give up; we lose sight of our importance, and therefore do not strive.

Maybe it's because there is simply too much government, that it intrudes into almost every aspect of our lives—directly or indirectly, grossly, subtly, insidiously—that we think as we do; unable to escape from governmental intru-

sion, we find it easier to capitulate and become dependent, as upon drugs, thus largely losing our self-sufficiency and initiative. Surely, some of the uncertainties of life have been reduced and offset, especially if we live in a welfare state, but at a price; at the same time, we have been lulled into complacency, and have lost something. To correct this, and bring about a state of balance that will enable us to stand on our own feet again, we need the strength and support of Dharma, so that we may see things clearly as they are, and put away the drugs of dependence.

***W**ho <u>am</u> I?* Most of us would probably ask ourselves this question sometime or other, although few would pursue it to a satisfactory or meaningful conclusion—few ever have done. It is rather a disturbing thing that many of us prefer not to think long about but to put out of mind as too imponderable or abstract; indeed, many of us never consider it at all, being content with the names our parents gave us, feeling we thereby already know who we are. Thus, we live our entire lives, as brief or as long as they might be, in ignorance of what it means to be human, with all its wonder and splendid potential.

The question is far more complex than it appears, and would lead, if we followed it up, to many fields of inquiry and realization, and involve vast periods of time; we are just so much more than we think we are. We have not come to be what or as we are by our own efforts, designs or wishes, but as the result of many things before us. Where we began, we really do not know, but there are reasons—very good and compelling reasons—for us to be optimistic about our human state, and to remind ourselves or be reminded about it. This is especially so for people who feel personally inadequate.

Present in each one of us is the sum total of human endeavor since as far back as we can imagine; we have so much to be grateful for and feel good about; failure to do so is a betrayal and repudiation of all that people in the past and present have ever struggled for; we should remember

that we all—every one of us—ride on others' backs throughout our entire lives. Although we don't like to be reminded of it, and talk of it is unpopular today, nevertheless, we have a moral responsibility to understand and use what they left us, and to go further than they went on the road to Enlightenment, for this is our true work in life. Later on, looking back, we will see the whole process quite differently, and realize that what we used to look on as responsibility or duty was really a joy. Right now, there may not be much joy in our lives, but so much awaits us if we will turn our faces towards it.

Present, too, is the possibility for undreamed-of growth, not just for us personally, but for us *as a species.* We have the capacity for Enlightenment and the expansion of consciousness to the degree that self is forgotten or crowded out and unity with All is known. Lacking self-confidence and feeling negative about ourselves—even to the point of self-hate—are definite hindrances and show lack of understanding of what we might become.

Leaving aside *who* we are for now, with our personal identities, let us first focus on *what* we are. We are human beings, *homo sapiens.* But since most of us—I dare say—have thought little about this, and have taken it all for granted, it is necessary to point out something of what it *means* to be human.

Is it something light to be able to see, to hear, to smell, taste and touch? Is it nothing special to think and reason and understand? Is it something ordinary to stand and walk and feel and talk? We really do not know how we do these things, and many other things besides; why not take time out now and then to think about them? We have gone too far away from ourselves and need to come back, and learn what wonderful beings we are. Do we have to lose our sight before we will see, our hearing before we can hear? We often don't know what we've got until we've lost it, and then it's too late. What I am saying is that just as we are—even with our imperfections—we are wonderful! And then,

to feel and become aware of our potential—what joy! We do not know where we came from, do not really understand where we are, and have no idea where we are going, but we may take stock of what we've got, and realize that it has not come from nowhere.

Now, most of the good things that we use, enjoy, and take so much for granted—including the very letters I am using to communicate my ideas thus—were not created by us, but by others, who no doubt struggled against and overcame many difficulties in order to bequeath us their discoveries and inventions, regardless of the fact that some of them, like Thomas Edison, for example, did so as a profession and made money from them; we have not really earned these things, but have somehow had the good fortune to be born at a time when such things are readily available and which make life much easier than it otherwise would be. But must we always be receivers, inheriting the good results of other people's labors? Certainly, we cannot all be great inventors who produce things to benefit others, but we *can* all participate in the discoveries of others, and repay them somewhat by rejoicing in them, being grateful, and taking care of the things we've got. By cultivating gratitude, our minds will thereby be prepared for the growth of many other positive qualities.

Firstly, because we enter into the spirit of other people's discoveries and inventions, we expand and open our hearts and minds, and to the extent that we do so, selfishness is crowded out. Secondly, we prepare ourselves to contribute what and when we can, and to do so is already a discovery: I, you, we, all have things to contribute to the world as a whole, for the simple reason that the world is made up of individuals like you and I, and so, if we change the way we think, the way we act and live will also change, and, as a result, the world we live in will be changed, too. It is a mistake, therefore, to think we can do nothing to change the world for the better, but always to wait for 'someone else' to do it for us; whatever we are doing, you

and I, is having an effect, whether we realize it or not. There is no world apart from you, I and other people like us.

And so, if we come to see that we are part of it all, and that we do have something to offer, we shall probably find a meaning to life and a sense of purpose after all. I, for one, am not content to sit back idly and let the world go on the way it is doing, without at least opening my mouth to say something about it and drawing attention to it. My life does have a meaning, and it is not just for myself, either. You see, it is like this: even on the level of language, *I* cannot exist without *you*, nor *you* without *me*; each needs the other to give meaning to itself. And, from seeing this, arises LOVE, which is something we all need so much, regardless of the fact that the word has almost lost its meaning; *I* need to love *you*, and *you* need to love *me*, for love must be given as well as received. And if we cannot give it, how shall we receive it?

If/when we see that we have touched someone positively, and made a difference, no matter how small, in their lives, we feel good; we get a feeling of satisfaction, knowing that we have done something worthwhile. When we do something good, it leaves no residue; we may sleep peacefully, without worrying about what we have done and wishing we hadn't done it; we may forget it completely. When we do something wrong, however, it is not like that; our conscience nags us and will not let us forget it; it may even cause sleeplessness as we lie there thinking: "I've done something wrong! How I wish I hadn't done that!" There is a residue from doing wrong.

Feedback from my books assures me that I've touched some people positively by my words, and this makes me feel good, of course. Words are very useful tools whose value we underestimate; they allow us to express ourselves and communicate with others about almost anything; the joy of communicating, and knowing we are being received and understood has probably been felt by every

traveler in a foreign land where he is unable to speak the language and most of the people do not speak his. Finding someone there with whom he can communicate at a higher level than mere sign-language is such a relief!

LINKS

WE KNOW WE LACK certain qualities, and would like to be other than we are. All the good qualities we would like come from seeing things clearly. This is why the first stage of the Noble Eight-fold Path—*Sammaditthi*—Right Understanding, Right View or Vision—is so important we must have a vision of how things are in order to walk the Way with any confidence, or we might just stumble along in the dark. Things are Impermanent, Unsatisfactory, and Empty of Self-being. But although this is how things are, we must see behind appearances, beyond the rising and falling, coming and going. Amidst all the pain and horror of life, we might find wonder, and a cause to rejoice. If Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness, and Voidness-of-Self were the totality of things, it would really be a sad state, and we might well give up in despair. But, as the Buddha said: "There is an Unborn, an Unoriginated, an Uncreated, an Unformed. Were there not this Unborn, this Unoriginated, this Uncreated, this Unformed, there would be no escape from the realm of the Born, the Originated, the Created, the Formed."

So little is said about what lies behind and beyond *Anicca*, *Dukkha* and *Anatta*—Impermanence, Suffering, and No-Self—because we do not know it, and if we talked too much about it, people would grasp at the words—forgetting that words are not the things they refer to—and get stuck at that level, instead of using them as far as they can take us, and going beyond. But the other side of Anicca is 'Nicca' (Permanence), behind Dukkha lies 'Sukha' (Happiness, or Bliss), and behind Anatta (No-Self), lies our true identity, or Suchness, though we must be very careful not to call it 'Atta' (Self or Soul), for the reason given above: that people would become attached to the word or idea, and fail to see that it is not that.

These things however, must be realized intuitively; understanding them intellectually is not enough. Intellectual understanding may be transmitted from one to another; it can be taught, but intuitive understanding cannot. The Dharma is to be realized by the wise, each for himself.

What might be communicated, however, is the fact that we depend. We do not live alone, by and for ourselves; it is simply not possible to do so. We depend not only upon air, water, food and other such supports, but upon other people, so much so that almost everything we have has come from others—including the bulk of our knowledge. And, day-by-day, we get deeper and deeper into debt to others, regardless of the fact that we pay, in money, for their goods and services. If, for example, you were a multi-millionaire, but cars, TVs, refrigerators, and so on, had not yet been invented, you could not buy them, with all your money. And such things are available only because people cooperate to make them; it is not just a matter of being able to pay for them. We should look beyond the price of things, to see what is involved in their manufacture.

It would be impossible—*impossible*—to discover how many people are involved in the production of the food we eat daily, for no sooner would we identify some of them, than we would find others behind them, in never-ending concentric circles. If we were patient and determined enough to follow it up, we would finally be forced to admit that the whole universe is involved in all the food we eat—and in everything else, too. Nobody and nothing exists in and by itself; everything is interconnected.

Humbled by realizing this, instead of trying to get more from life than we already have—and we have *so* much already, so how dare we even think of getting anything else?—we might begin to ask: "What can *I* put back? What can *I* give?—with hearts full of gratitude, joy and wonder.

And, when we can do this, we might find that we have things to put back, give and share that we didn't even know

we had. We will stop exploiting life for everything we can get out of it, and learn to live with it, rather than against it. First, we must have the heart to give—the *willingness* to give—and then, within this willing heart, as it begins to open, we will find treasures that have always been there, unrecognized and unused.

Each of us is like a link in the middle of a chain that stretches out to infinity on either side. On one side of us, there are people who are more advanced and evolved than we are, who are wiser and know more than us, and from whom we can benefit and receive help. On the other side are people—countless millions of them—who are less evolved than we are, who do not know even the little that we know, who are living in spiritual darkness, some of whom might benefit and receive help from us.

With one hand, we reach out to receive help from others more advanced than we are—just as they receive help from others more advanced than they—and we stretch out the other hand to render help to others behind us. Those who have helped us do not expect us to repay them—what could we could give them, anyway?—but to pass on what we have received. So, we take in, and give out, and thereby create space in us to go on receiving; if we were only to take in and not give out, we would soon be filled up and unable to receive any more. It is not from the thought or desire of getting more that we give out, however, but because it's natural to do so, and because we see that what we have received, in whatever measure—the Dharma—is of inestimable value to the world, and is what the world greatly needs. Giving is not hard; what is hard is finding people to give to, for few people, it seems, are ready to receive Dharma. They need it—everyone needs it—but not everyone wants it; and it must be wanted in order to be received and appreciated. When people do not understand and appreciate the Dharma, we cannot expect them to rejoice over it and use it in their lives. A dog would appreciate a bone, but it would be a waste to give it a diamond.

Yet there are some who can and do understand, and it is for the sake of them that we must continue scattering our seeds, even though we know as we do so, that many, or even most, will never grow. But if only five percent or even two or one—grow, our efforts will not have been in vain.

On our way, we must learn to take
The rough with the smooth,
The bad with the good,
The ugly with the beautiful,
The old with the young,
The bitter with the sweet,
The hard with the easy,
The pain with the pleasure,
The sorrow with the joy,
The black with the white,
The rain with the shine,
The wrong with the right,
The blame with the praise,
The low with the high,
The poor with the rich,
The failure with the success,
The loss with the gain,
The defeat with the victory,

because if we always look for easy ways and short cuts, we might eventually find that they are wrong ways. Some pain and hardship must be expected and endured if we are to complete our journey.

PAPER PEOPLE

SOME OF US HABITUALLY 'DROP NAMES'—using other people's names to create a good impression of ourselves. Being perhaps unknown and feeling ourselves unimportant, leading dull and shallow lives, we like to mention well-known people in connection with ourselves, as if doing so will add luster and dignity to ourselves. But this is foolish and transparent, like trying to steal someone else's merit. Moreover, there is really no need for it, as we would discover, with a little investigation, that we are *all* special, just as we are, without calling attention to ourselves in any way.

As a monk, I am often asked questions like, "Do you know Master So-and-so?" "Have you met Venerable This-and-that?" "Have you visited Lama What's-his-name?" Such questions are boorish and impolite, as they're meant to measure and judge. Do they think I have no mind of my own? True, my mind might not be very bright, and I might not be famous, but I *am* able to think for myself, and consider myself sufficiently intelligent that I do not need to be led along like a cow on a rope. Just as I don't follow fashion, so I do not play the 'guru-hunting' game and never have. Life itself is the Guru, and that means everyone and everything. If we know how to learn, there is nobody and nothing that is not our Dharma-teacher. (Someone once said to me: "I suppose you are a doctor?" [meaning a holder of a Ph.D.] Refusing to go along with his categorizations or measurements, I replied: "No, I'm a patient.")

During my years in Asia, I saw it is not rare for people to *Take Refuge* several times under different monks. Whenever a famous monk visits, and conducts a *Refuge* ceremony, they rush to *Take Refuge* under him, and then add another illustrious name to their list of masters, perhaps thinking they have gained great merit from contact with such monks, even though they probably learned little or nothing from them. Ignorant of the doctrine of *ANATTA* (Selflessness or Insubstantiality), they misunderstand about

Taking Refuge, and make of it a personality game. If they knew anything of the Dharma, they would know that when they Take Refuge, it is not in the person of the monk who conducts the ceremony and recites the ancient formulas; in fact, going deeper, it is not necessary to undergo a ceremony at all; the only necessary and important thing is to make a sincere commitment to oneself about following the Way. A ceremony just adds a little weight—for those who need it, and not everyone does—to the significance of the undertaking, especially if the person conducting the ceremony explains the meaning of it clearly.

As it is, misunderstanding about this is not restricted to the laity; many monks suffer from it, and actively propagate it, so it's not surprising their followers misunderstand. I have met monks who have 'disciple-cards' printed, with their own names already there in bold; all the 'disciples' have to do is fill in their names, and the monk then adds them to his 'score-card': "*I* have so many disciples! How many do *you* have?" One monk I met in Canada even urged people to burn their old Refuge certificates and Take Refuge again under him! What lies behind all this except ego? Such monks are more concerned with their own positions and prestige, as leaders of so many followers, than in helping people to understand the Dharma.

Some people ask: "Who is your Dharma-teacher?" and, not really wanting or waiting for an answer, proudly proclaim: "*My* teacher is So-and-so." Ask them what their teacher has taught them and what they have learned from him, and there is often an embarrassed silence. It is just like believers in reincarnation claiming to have been someone famous in a previous life. Years ago, in Manila, I heard that, in that city alone, there were at least 400 people who claim to have been *Cleopatra* of Egypt! Well, obviously, only one person could have been Cleopatra before, but unless she is a queen in this life, is not at that level now, and so had better be quiet about it, as she has come down in the world. If, however, a person was someone obscure

in the previous life, but in this life has become famous, there may be some cause for celebration. Similarly, if someone has learned something from a teacher, there might be a reason for boasting of him—even if he himself is unknown—but otherwise not.

The Refuge certificates are rather elaborate and artistic, but does a ceremony or certificate make one a Buddhist? If we haven't undergone a ceremony, and have no certificate, does it mean we cannot follow the Dharma if we wish to? We have allowed ourselves to be intimidated and brain-washed by these bits of paper that people brandish and wave about—including educational certificates, degrees, diplomas, etc.—and have lost sight of what it means to be flesh-and-blood, breathing, thinking, feeling human-beings; we have become 'paper-people,' no longer having minds of our own or the ability to think for ourselves; so we fall into every trap, pit, or pot-hole, big and small, along life's way.

A certain monk in the US used to boast of his psychic powers and impress gullible and empty-headed people with talk of 'dragons taking refuge under his preaching-throne,' and other things that he knew could neither be verified nor disproved. Instead of doubting his dubious claims and asking for proof (such a thing is 'not done'), people just believed, and fell into his clutches! Oh, maybe he *did* have psychic powers—I'm not disputing that!—but did he separate them from his ego? That is the question.

There was a person in Malaysia who was so proud of having read many books that in his prolific writings he took to putting stars beside some of the big and seldom-used words; these were then explained in a 'difficult-words' section at the end of his articles, for the sake of those who were not so 'educated' as he. In so doing, he not only allowed his towering pride to glare through, but implicitly insulted his readers, relegating them to a lower level and exalting himself. Maybe he thought big words and academic posturing are necessary to understand Dharma and the propagation thereof, whereas the opposite is more the

case; if the aim is to help others understand something of Dharma, simpler words should be used wherever possible, so that anyone—even children, and not just highly-educated people—may comprehend.

To a large extent, Buddhism has become *'monkocentric'*—if I may coin a term here, meaning 'centered around monks'—which is quite wrong, as the center place does not even belong to the Buddha Himself, but to the Dharma alone. It was not, and should not be, a personality cult.

I was once given a calling-card by a monk who was very proud of his rank and position. On it, among his various titles and qualifications, was printed: *Great Dharma Master*. It reminded me of a little story about a Zen master in Japan long ago, who was one day visited by the governor of Kyoto. Handing his card to the master's attendant, the governor waited to be called into the master's quarters.

When the master looked at the card and saw the words: *Kitagaki, Governor of Kyoto*, he said to the attendant: "I have no business with such a fellow! Tell him to go away!"

The attendant shame-facedly returned the card to the governor and told him what the master had said. Kitagaki, however, having some knowledge of the Dharma, was not upset, and said, "That was my error." He then crossed out the words 'Governor of Kyoto' with a pencil, and asked the attendant to take the card back to the master.

"Oh, is Kitagaki here?" exclaimed the master when he saw the amended card. "What are you waiting for? Bring him in! I've been wanting to see him for ages!"

It might surprise some Buddhists to learn that the idea of *Taking Refuge* is *pre*-Buddhist, and did not originate with the Buddha. Where it *did* originate, I don't know (under the pervasive concept of everything being illusory or unreal—*Maya*—Indians attached little importance to recording history), but it must have been a stock-phrase for people to use to a teacher who had impressed them: "I take refuge in you and your teachings," as people were saying these

words to the Buddha shortly after His Enlightenment—even before the calling of the first monks—and we can't imagine Him telling people to say: "Repeat after me," kind of thing. Following His way of accepting instead of rejecting existing customs, and giving them new meanings so as not to alienate people, Buddhism adopted the Refuge formula, which became central. And so the words *Buddham Saranam Gacchami, Dhammam Saranam Gacchami, Sangham Saranam Gacchami,* have been recited by countless millions of devotees from ancient times until the present, meaning: *I Take Refuge in the Buddha* (the Teacher), *I Take Refuge in the Dharma* (the Teachings, and more: as that which the Buddha discovered and thereafter tried to indicate to others by His Teachings), *I Take Refuge in the Sangha* (the wider Buddhist Community, consisting of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen). People *Take Refuge* when they understand and are convinced that this is the way they wish to follow; to merely repeat the formula without understand or conviction has little meaning.

And so, don't be satisfied with mere certificates, but go for the real thing.

NOT SO NARROW

AFTER READING ONE OF MY BOOKS, a friend wrote to me, saying: “It is not good for a Dharma-speaker to explain the words of Jesus and other heretics in a Buddhist way, for the simple reason that the listeners will be misled into thinking that the heretic preachings are the same as the Teachings of the Buddha, thus degrading the Dharma. It is happening now. People don’t know how to distinguish the Truth from the Non-Truth, and think that all religions are the same. In so doing, they are also degrading the Teachings of the Buddha into mere religion. This, sadly, is the main cause of the *Kali Yuga.*”

Well, he’s entitled to his ideas, of course, but I still maintain that Dharma is broad and all-embracing, not narrow and exclusive belonging only to Buddhism. This would be clearer if we distinguish what the Buddha taught (Buddha-Dharma), from what He realized upon His Enlightenment (Dharma); the two are often confused and considered to be one-and-the-same-thing. But Dharma is not something that the Buddha invented or put together; it exists independently of the Buddha; a Buddha is someone who discovers it and points it out to others.

The Buddha told of Three Characteristics He had discovered: (1), that all compounded things are impermanent, and change constantly [ANICCA]; (2), that all living things, from the tiniest to the largest, feel pain and suffer [DUKKHA]; and (3), that nothing exists in and by itself, but only in dependence upon supporting factors [ANATTA]. Is anything not subject to these conditions? They form part of the overall Law of Cause-and-Effect, which applies to everything, animate and inanimate. This, and what lies behind it—its positive aspect, about which little can be said, but which must be realized by the individual, each person by and for himself—is one of the meanings of the word Dharma. When we speak of ‘practicing Dharma,’ we mean the application of some of the principles of the Buddha’s Teachings, or

Buddha-Dharma, the aim of which is to harmonize ourselves with Universal Dharma. Dharma, therefore, is not something man-made, like some moralistic code, but is WHAT *IS*. And it is not in the good without being in the bad, not in the right without being in the wrong, not in the white without being in the black, but in everything. Maybe we can better say: everything is in Dharma, in that everything functions thereby—even pain and evil have causes, and are not accidents, but the effects of certain causes. Thus, nothing is outside of Dharma. And though we try to avoid doing evil and causing pain, we must know about such things, for good has no meaning apart from evil, wisdom no meaning apart from ignorance, Nirvana no meaning apart from Samsara (unenlightened existence). In this way, evil and ignorance can be seen as having important roles to play.

If we perceive Dharma, as Truth or Reality, only in or through the Buddha's Teachings, not only might we easily become bigoted and dogmatic; it means we have not really understood at all. The Buddha claimed no monopoly on Truth, for Truth, like the sky above or the air we breathe, is free and open, and cannot be monopolized or confined. And, if the Buddhist scriptures are accurate, He Himself told His followers that if they found Truth in other religions, they should accept it; by this, perhaps He meant that a diamond is a diamond no matter where it's found. The simile of the Buddha's Teachings being like a finger that points at the moon, but not as the moon it points at, is well known.

Though I am not a Christian or a follower of Jesus, it does not mean I can learn nothing from him. I do not consider him a 'savior', 'Son of God', or even fully-enlightened, but we would need a very-high opinion of ourselves to feel we could learn nothing from him! As we progress along the Way, we find we can learn something useful from anyone and everyone, anything and everything, without exception. There is still room in my world for Jesus of Nazareth.

Having criticized Christianity numerous times and exposed out what I consider to be its fallacies, maybe it is

time for me to acknowledge my gratitude to it—and I *am* grateful to it—because it played a part in my life, and without it, my life would surely have been different than it is.

Why I was born in England rather than elsewhere, no-one can say, of course, but I was, and as a result, was exposed to the influence of Christianity. To regret this, even if I would, is useless; it is much better to try to extract something positive from the experience; I can and will do this.

It is more often the case than not that people do not understand and appreciate the religion they were raised in, in the same way that fish probably don't understand the water they were born and live in; it's just part of their environment. This is so with Buddhists no less than with people of other religions, and I consider myself fortunate that I was not born into a Buddhist family; *had* I been, perhaps I would have found little of value in it, but, like most people who call themselves 'Buddhists,' might have taken it all for granted as 'just something there,' unworthy of any investigation.

In my childhood, therefore, Christianity was the only religion I knew anything of; I had nothing to compare it with, and so could not consider it 'the best,' for to do so requires a knowledge of other religions, which I did not have. But I didn't remain in ignorance about this forever, and when I later came into contact with other religions—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism—my Christian upbringing provided me with a basis for making comparisons. Instead of fearfully holding onto my own background-religion, however, and considering it unquestionably superior to these 'other' religions, I found myself investigating, and was happy to find that, especially with the *Eastern* religions, there were exciting concepts I had known almost nothing of before, and besides which Christianity appeared narrow and immature. This inspired me to investigate further—not only the other religions, but Christianity, too—and since then, I have understood more of Christianity (insofar as it might *be* un-

derstood), than I ever did before, and now, although I still respect Jesus, I am happy that I 'graduated' from Christianity. Yet I am grateful to it, as I said, for it provided me with a 'platform,' like the launching-pad of a rocket, without which the rocket could not take off.

It is not uncommon to hear Christianity being castigated —I've done it myself—for such horrors as 'The Holy Wars,' 'The Holy Inquisition,' the persecution and murder of *millions* of people whom it regarded as 'heretics' or deviants, and the wholesale destruction of indigenous cultures in the New World and other lands. But we should give credit where credit is due, and acknowledge the role of the Christian Church in preserving some form of order, and acting as an anchor during those centuries after the Roman Empire collapsed, when Europe was overrun by wave after wave of marauding barbarians, whom the Church managed to tame and civilize somewhat. We cannot know what Europe—and therefore the rest of the Western world—would be like had not the Church been its dominant power; it is easy to say it might have been better, but it might also have been worse. But this is almost certain: without Christianity to oppose its spread, Islam would have conquered Europe over a thousand years ago, for within 100 years from the time when Mohammed proclaimed his message, Islam had spread right along the coast of North Africa, up through Spain, and into France, and almost reached Paris before being repulsed and driven back to Spain by the Franks. How rapid was its spread! And how brilliant was the Islamic civilization that developed and flourished in Spain until the Moors were finally expelled from that country by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, the year Columbus discovered America! That, alas, was Spain's loss!

Another thing I appreciate Christianity for is the magnificent 'stone dreams' it raised all over Europe during the beginning of the second millenium of the Christian Era—the cathedrals—though perhaps these came more from '*Marianity'* than from Christianity, for at that time, stern,

masculine and patriarchal Christianity was slowly and subtly being modified and softened by the rising cult of Mary, the feminine element that early Christianity had tried hard to destroy in the form of the ancient nature- and fertility-cults that were widespread in Europe; it did not succeed, despite its horrific persecutions, but only drove them underground, where they bided their time until, finding expression through Mary-worship, they gained legitimacy and triumphed. In Mary, people found a representative of the female principle on whom to lavish their devotion; this was reconciled with, and absorbed into Christian theology by regarding Mary as a go-between to intercede with her son Jesus on behalf of her petitioners, who felt that, if Jesus did not, or would not answer their prayers, he would not refuse the requests of his mother. It is not easy for us, who live in a secular age, to understand what a profound effect the cult of Mary had upon Christianity.

Since I wrote this in 1992, my research led to a different view of what happened in Europe after the Roman Empire collapsed, and I realized I had been naïve, but instead of omitting the previous two paragraphs, I've decided to leave them more-or-less intact, and add something else, to illustrate how, when more information comes to light or we learn something new, it can change the way we look at things considerably.

I was under the illusion that the Christian Church had preserved civilization in Europe during the 'Dark Ages,' but it seems that far from this being so, the Church was *responsible* for those centuries of cultural darkness, when only the monks and leading churchmen could read and write and even the nobles were illiterate. The Church, all along, was concerned with the acquisition of wealth and power, opposing change and development, and ruling with an iron hand. (Even the title of the Popes, 'Pontiff,' was taken from the Roman Emperors' appellation as 'Pontifex Maximus'—'Supreme Ruler'). Some of the leaders of the

'barbarian hordes' that over-ran Europe were much more civilized than the leaders of the Church, but their efforts to promote culture were stymied by the Church.

So, Europe became a cultural desert for a thousand years, while Islam flourished in the Middle East, North Africa and Spain. The West actually owes a great deal to Islam, as it was Islam, in places like as Spain, Sicily, Egypt and the Middle East, that preserved the science, philosophy and medical lore of ancient Greece and Rome while Europe languished under Church domination. Even before the irresistible upsurge of the Renaissance in the 14th and 15th centuries, European scholars, athirst for knowledge unavailable in Christian lands, journeyed to Spain and Sicily to avail themselves of education in the marvelous Muslim universities there. It is surely a tribute to the openness of Islam at that time that they should have been accepted and taught, without pressure to convert. Islamic culture was so much in advance of Western culture. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 was a blessing in disguise to Europe, as refugees fleeing to the West brought with them books and manuscripts of inestimable value that heralded the end of the Church's stranglehold. It was a time of stupendous change, when old beliefs were questioned and chains broken; the process continues until today.

HYPOCRISY

WE LIVE IN A WORLD where truth is not greatly valued, and it is sometimes dangerous to express our feelings openly. From our infancy, we are taught to dissemble and wear masks; it is often a matter of survival to do so.

Those who don't follow what tradition has decreed to be the 'norm' are branded 'non-conformist,' 'eccentric,' 'weird,' 'crazy,' etc.; the norm is seldom questioned. If we were bold enough to question it, however, we would probably find that many of the standards upon which it is based are laughable, moth-eaten, dried-up and obsolete, just like many of the laws that have come down to us from the past.

Once, after a long journey from Singapore, I arrived at the bus-station of a town in Malaysia and, while waiting for someone to pick me up, a young woman came up to me and asked if I were a Buddhist. I told her that, in order to answer her, she would first have to tell me what she understood by the term 'Buddhist,' as it might be different from my understanding of it. She said she didn't know much about Buddhism, so couldn't really tell me. However, it was an opening that led to other things. She went on to tell me that her father—who she'd loved dearly—had recently died, and she was very distressed by this, and, far from finding solace in anyone, had lost her faith in humanity; she complained that many people were hypocrites. At this, I had a flash of insight, and interrupted her, saying: "Yes, we are, aren't we?" and explained that we are all hypocrites at times—not because we want to be or try to be, but just because it is part of the condition of unenlightened life.

Just then, my ride came, and I went off. But I met this young woman again on several occasions, and explained a little more to her in a way she could understand, thus putting her mind more at ease. Meeting her at the bus-station was an auspicious beginning of what was to be an overall good trip in Malaysia; it was not planned or predestined,

but neither do I consider it an accident, because, as I have explained elsewhere in this book, there are no accidents—things that happen just by themselves; rather, things happen as the result of causes ripening together at certain points in time; all things have causes—countless causes—and are therefore not accidents.

We often say things, but do not act accordingly, and sometimes even do the opposite. We smile and are polite to people we don't like, but behind their backs we snarl and curse. A mother might say to her child: "If that's Mrs. So-and-so at the door, tell her I'm not at home." Thus, as children, we are given examples of how to deceive and cheat. Is it surprising that we become hypocrites? It is the way society is constituted; but perhaps it could not function without a certain amount of hypocrisy—after all, this is often what diplomacy is all about, is it not? We can tell lies, at times, merely by not telling the truth; they may not be direct lies, but, not being the truth, they are still lies, nevertheless.

Thailand is famous for the politeness of its people, and visitors are impressed by this, not realizing it is a cultural thing, and is often—but not always, of course—no more than a facade, a veneer that doesn't run very deep. It is like the cleanliness of Singapore, which I have discussed elsewhere in this book. Appearances are of primary importance to the Thais, and must be preserved at all costs; honesty and honor are not so treasured. Needless to say, this is fertile soil for hypocrisy, and I've always thought it strange how, in a country where beautiful temples are common, and monks in saffron robes are to be seen everywhere, there is so much corruption and low forms of living. Offend a Thai, and he will probably smile as if nothing's happened; he will display no hurt, but don't think that is the end of it, for he might remember and hold a grudge for years. Not only have I heard of this from others, but seen it myself. I've also observed Thai air-hostesses serving their passengers very politely and decorously, but with grimaces on their faces as they turn away. Thais aren't unique in this, of

course; it seems to be universal; but some are more skilled at disguising it than others. Westerners, in general, are rather brusque and to the point, and while this can be somewhat discomforting at times, it has the redeeming quality of leaving less doubt as to where they stand, though it, too, cannot be taken as a sure sign of sincerity.

Our world, it seems, is not yet ready for straightforwardness and honesty; such qualities are too stark and blunt for it, and must be diluted. If we were always honest with each other, we would constantly be at war, for we are immature and crave sweet words; truth is often the last thing we want. While residing in the Refugee Camp at Bataan, Philippines, I grew tired of the theft of refugees' mail from/in the Camp post-office; it was so common that it must have been an organized racket, involving, at times, many thousands of dollars, apart from the loss of important documents and information that people were anxiously awaiting and in need of. I denounced it at one of the weekly inter-agency meetings, and was later accused of 'cultural insensitivity' because I had dared to speak so openly about it, instead of in a veiled and 'discreet' way. My reaction to that—and I still feel the same way—was that if such things as mail-theft have anything to do with culture, then such 'culture' deserves to be exposed and vilified. Why should we tread with extreme care about people's feelings when they don't give a damn about the rights and feelings of others? If we expect others to consider our feelings, we must begin by considering the feelings of others, no?

I once heard a little story about an Australian who had been in Thailand a number of years and spoke fluent Thai. One day, he had hailed a cycle-rickshaw, and while being driven to his destination, someone asked the driver where he was going. Not realizing that his passenger could understand, the driver replied: "Oh, I'm just taking this hairy monkey where he wants to go". Upon reaching his destination, the man got down and walked away, at which the rickshaw-driver called out to him in broken English to pay his

fare. In perfect Thai, the Australian responded: “But hairy monkeys don’t have money!” Embarrassed, the driver no longer insisted upon getting his fare.

We recognize and condemn hypocrisy in others, but it is not so easy to see and accept it in ourselves; we are experts in rationalizing things in ourselves that we condemn in others. And, when we finally have to admit that we ourselves have the same faults, we feel depressed and miserable; sometimes, the self-image that we have painstakingly constructed, like a pyramid of cards, collapses, and there seems to be nothing left. Unable to face the pain and despair of this, and the thought of the immense task of reconstruction—of accepting themselves as they are and starting all over again—some people give up and commit suicide.

If *only* we were not hypocritical about being so! If *only* we would honestly and fearlessly accept the existence in ourselves of faults and imperfections, as we accept physical diseases and handicaps, then we would be better able to come to grips with them and deal with them. If *only* we would accept the fact that we are not perfect and still have a long way to go; it would be much better for ourselves, and we would probably find that we would get along better with others, and learning from them would become much easier. If *only* we would stand back at times, and see ourselves from a distance, as others see us, and, instead of always taking ourselves seriously, see the comical side of our efforts to become other than we are; fanatics, especially, are so much in need of this.

We all have negative qualities and imperfections of character—why, we do not know, but it is definitely not because we want them, as they cause embarrassment and pain when we become aware of them in ourselves, as are things like stuttering, facial tics, bad-breath, body-odor and so on. We do not like them or want them, but they do not immediately go away because of that, and cling on tenaciously. It is the same with other people, too. Most of us want to be good; few of us really want to be bad, although

some people cultivate 'tough-and-mean' images (out of insecurity and ignorance that they are already special people, just as they are). For example, if we heard someone say about us: "He's a good man," we would probably feel pleased. But would we be happy to over-hear someone say about us: "He's a bad man"? Of course, we should know ourselves well enough to be able to check what is said about us in the light of self-knowledge and thereby avoid being overcome and corrupted by flattery and praise, or depressed by criticism or blame. Self-knowledge helps us recognize and accept the limitations of others, too. Ironically, the very things that we criticize in others are often there in ourselves; maybe that's how we recognize them in others in the first place. In order to avoid harmful and negative things, we must first know them as such, for if we don't, we might easily find ourselves doing those same things.

To deal with our hypocrisy, some adjustment to our self-image must be made. Needless to say, this will involve time, effort, and some discomfort, but if honesty and truth are of any importance to us, we will not mind that so much, and regard it as a small price to pay for self-improvement. We will need all the help we can get, so should understand something of the nature of criticism, as it can be an invaluable tool, and save us much time and trouble.

Just as we cannot see our own face, but only a reflection of it in the mirror, so it is hard to see our own faults, as we have either been taught to regard them as not-faults or learned to justify them. Others can often see our faults clearer than we ourselves can.

Now, if we have a friend who cares enough about us to occasionally point out some negative quality in us for the sake of our self-improvement, we are very fortunate. We are more fortunate still if we can accept his/her advice in the spirit in which it is given, without getting upset or feeling hurt. Nor does well-meant advice and constructive criticism need to come from someone we know; a complete stranger might be a friend in his concern towards us, by warning us

of some danger along the way ahead, from where he has just come, for example; it is not uncommon for motorists to flash their headlights at oncoming cars to warn of police speed-traps just up ahead, thereby enabling them to avoid them by slowing down. And, if someone were to say to you: "Excuse me, but you have something on your face"—perhaps from your breakfast—you would not immediately become sad or upset, but would automatically put your hand to your face in search of it; and, upon finding the food-fragment—if it were there—would then probably say: "Thanks for telling me; I didn't know!" You would be grateful for advice about something that might otherwise cause you more embarrassment.

Even harsh criticism from enemies or unfriendly people can be dealt with and used constructively if we know how to view it. Such criticism is often meant to hurt, but will lose its power to do so if we examine it to see if it is true and really applies to us. If it *is* true—and our enemies *do* sometimes tell us the raw truth about ourselves, keeping nothing back, in their desire to hurt us, while our friends prefer not to tell us the truth at times, from fear of hurting or offending us—then we should think about it and see in what way it can be utilized for our self-improvement and eventual benefit; it may then be looked on as an unintended gift. If it is not true, it does not apply, and we might think that the critic needs to see an optician or something. In either case, there is no reason to get upset. If someone called you a monkey, you would not immediately grow a tail and start swinging around in the trees, would you?

Rules are made to be broken, and everyone knows that. If we all lived honestly and treated others fairly, we would need very few rules. Bob Dylan sang: "To live outside the law you must be honest"; rules are made for dishonest people, or for helping people become straight, and have no meaning otherwise. Of course, we are talking here about just and reasonable laws, which are made for the benefit and protection of the whole community, and not just

for the elite few. So, although individual freedom might be somewhat curtailed, we probably would not mind this if it is clearly in the interests of all. A lawless society, where people did just whatever they felt like doing, regardless of the rights and feelings of others, would be quite undesirable, and we would soon cry out for police-protection and more laws against the violent, aggressive and unscrupulous elements in our midst. If we cannot or will not voluntarily restrain ourselves, someone else must restrain us. Is it not better to do it by choice, and from seeing the benefits of voluntary restraint?

To live responsibly and with restraint is the beginning of overcoming our negative traits and hypocrisy. And if/when others see us trying to restrain ourselves, they might begin to disregard our negative qualities as "Not important; it doesn't matter," and might even be encouraged to follow our example. Many people depend on others to make the first move—like pioneers, as it were—as they themselves lack the courage and initiative to do so. Then, upon seeing that these 'pioneers'—who were bold enough to venture into unmapped territory—have succeeded somewhat, they might overcome their hesitation and faint-heartedness, and follow. Are you brave enough to be different, and make the first move?

And, while avoiding deliberate hypocrisy, do not feel so bad when you are unintentionally hypocritical, because in this, you are not alone. We are *this* side of Enlightenment, remember, and hypocrisy is just one of many negative qualities we have in common with people all around us and all over the world. Don't worry; we change and grow, and do not remain the same forever. And the more we understand, the more we change, and the more we grow.

THE PRICE OF LOVE

IT IS NOT HARD TO SEE that the more we love, the more we might have to suffer; separation from and loss of the object of our love is inevitable, and often followed by grief, despair, lamentation and dejection; knowing this, we can be better prepared for it, and it need not catch us off guard. Everything has a price, and love is no exception. If we want a thing, we must be prepared to pay for it, or do without.

If only we realized that life is like a game, we might engage in it with clearer awareness of the risks and possibilities involved—the risks of failure and loss, the possibilities of success and gain. At birth, we do not come with a written guarantee that we are going to live until a ripe old age; as we can see from a visit to any cemetery, some die in infancy—indeed, some are *stillborn*!—others in the bloom of youth, some in the prime of life, and only *some* when they are old. There are many possibilities that we should understand and accept when we play the game. We begin to play the game, of course—or the game begins—at the moment of conception; it is only many years later that we are able to understand it as a game with rules (unfortunately, many of us *never* realize this). And if we are afraid to participate in the Game, and sit still, like statues, the game will carry us onwards and sweep us away nevertheless. So we should know something of the rules or conditions of the Game of Life.

Everything changes. Deep inside, we know this to be so, and in this sense, and to this extent, we are all on the Way. But because we don't fully understand it, we tend to resist and reject it, hoping that somehow, Change will pass us by. When things go well for us, when we are happy and fortunate, we wish them to remain so and not change; we view change then as something negative. But when things don't go as we want, when we are sick, unhappy, or in danger, we desire change, and view it as positive. Change,

however, is neither positive nor negative but simply Change, and the sooner we understand this and adapt ourselves to it, the better, as the Universal Law of Change will never adapt itself to us or our wishes. Moreover, we cannot prevent Change taking place, so should change our minds about it. Change is not our enemy, as we sometimes think; in fact, if we understand it, we may ride on its back.

Life does not always go on an incline, from good to better, as most of us would like and many of us expect; nor does it always go on a decline, from bad to worse, as lots of us appear to think; nor does it always go on a level plane, with apparently no change. Rather, life is like the ocean, never still for a moment, with waves rising and falling. Sometimes, we are on the crest of a wave, and sometimes down in the trough; sometimes, we are on the way up, and sometimes on the way down. When we are on a wave-crest, with everything going for us, we want it to remain like that, of course, but it does not and will not. Knowing this, we tell ourselves not to cling onto something that will inevitably slip through our grasp. And so, when the high passes and we begin to come down—and sometimes it happens very quickly and suddenly, as we all know—we will not feel so bad. Our lows, too, can be ameliorated by understanding and telling ourselves that it won't last, but, like everything else, will change. Our attachment to both high and low therefore diminishes.

While we grow older, moment-by-moment, get sick, and die because of the inexorable Law of Change, it is nonetheless true that we grow, learn, and stand a chance of becoming Enlightened because of the very same Law. *We do not have to remain at our present state of evolution, thank goodness!* How terrible it would be if we did!

As a man, I can never experience giving birth—giving birth to ideas, yes, but not to a child. By all accounts, however, it is a painful process, yet most mothers do not stop at just one child. Isn't it strange? Wouldn't we think that once would be enough? The motherly instinct must be so

strong to cheerfully accept the pain as the price of having the child, especially when there is no way of knowing what the child will turn out to be like.

The old song by Simon and Garfunkel—*I am a Rock*—puts it so:

"Don't talk of love;
I've heard the word before;
It's sleeping in my memory.
I won't disturb the slumber
Of feelings that have died;
If I'd never loved,
I never would have cried.
I am a Rock;
I am an Island.
And a Rock feels no pain,
And an Island never cries".

Does it mean that, to avoid being hurt, we must reject love and make our hearts cold and hard, like stones? How could we do that, even if we wanted to? Love comes to us, and often there is little we can do about it. True, the love that springs up like this is often transient, but it's real while it lasts, and few people would give it up while it's there.

Then how? Well, like the mother giving birth, accept the pain as the price of love. It is unrealistic to imagine or wish for a life without pain; such wishing only causes more pain and disappointment. And we will feel pain and suffer in any case, whether we love or not.

"I do not seek; I find".
Pablo Picasso.

TAKING A STAND

SOME TIME AGO, I PICKED up a Buddhist magazine, on the cover of which was a design purporting to show the hand of the Buddha turning the Dharma-wheel. On the back cover, however, there was a commercial advertising, among other things, meat and fish for sale. Strange companions, front and back!

Certainly, I am aware that money must be raised for the publishing of such magazines; it doesn't grow on trees. But I also think that discretion should be used in the selection of advertisements to be included in Buddhist magazines, even if it means rejecting some and thereby losing some funds; after all, the purpose of publishing such magazines is to propagate the Dharma, is it not? If we compromise our principles, we defeat our purpose. By allowing the pages of a Buddhist magazine to be used for advertising meat for sale, we are—even if only indirectly—condoning killing.

Feel free to disagree; it won't prevent me speaking out. Some Buddhists maintain that the Buddha never said we should be vegetarians, and that monks (who the bulk of the Buddhist rules apply to), may eat whatever is offered to them, as long as they do not see, hear, or suspect that the animals, fish or fowl were killed especially for them; if they so see, hear or suspect, they are forbidden to eat the flesh. But this standpoint is totally indefensible, as anyone who looks at things a little objectively can see. And to say, as some people do, that by eating meat, they are helping the animals with their spiritual growth, is too ridiculous and transparent to be seriously considered for a moment.

Firstly, the Buddha never called anyone to believe or follow Him; instead, He urged people to see for themselves and find out what is true. Even so, many Buddhists become prisoners of books, repeating things like parrots or tape-recorders, without investigating, thereby missing the great value of the Buddha's Way, which is a Way of self-reliance.

He exhorted people to “Test my Teachings as a gold-smith would test gold,” and “Work out your own salvation with diligence” (according to the Buddhist scriptures, these were His last words), and not depend upon Him to save them, because “Buddhas are only Teachers; they do but point the Way”—which is the most that anyone can do; belief in saviors is regarded as a myth, with no foundation in fact.

To use scripture to justify the disgusting and cruel habit of eating meat is both dishonest and unworthy. I’ve never been able to reconcile the preaching *of Metta-Karuna* (Loving-Kindness & Compassion) with the practice of meat-eating; they contradict each other. And as to seeing, hearing or suspecting that the animal was killed especially for someone, well, for whom is the animal killed if not for those who eat its flesh? No amount of twisting, juggling and verbal gymnastics can get around that. If nobody ate meat, the butcher would not kill the animals. This is not only obvious to everyone except those who refuse to see, but is in line with the Buddha’s teachings about the Law of Dependent Origination, or Cause-and-Effect in the moral realm, whereby it is shown how one thing leads to another in a chain-like sequence. Let us examine the eating of meat by this doctrine, and see what it involves:

THE CONSUMER. The consumer likes to eat meat, and his desire to do so is the main force that keeps this Killing Wheel turning.

THE KILLER. Because of people’s habit of eating meat, others see a way of earning a living and take up the gun and knife to engage in butchery. There will always be butchers and war and senseless destruction of life, as long as people condone killing; it is a matter of demand-and-supply: if there is a market for meat, some will try to supply it—just as with drugs, sex and weapons.

THE ANIMALS. The animals are victims of the unwholesome desire for flesh. Though it may be the karma of the animals to be killed—as some believe—that does not ex-

cuse the killer. The cause produces the effect, and the effect, in turn, becomes the cause of other effects, and so on.

THE BUYER. The butcher kills for money. If nobody ate meat, the butcher would have to find another job. Those who buy and eat meat keep the butcher's hands bloody, and the only people to whom this is not clear are those who do not want to see.

It is like the trade in ivory and rhinoceros-horn: because of the demand for these things, elephants and rhinos have been hunted and killed to the point where they are now in danger of extinction. Ivory is prized for its beauty and rhino-horn for what is believed to be its aphrodisiacal-properties, which is probably just another silly and cruel superstition. In order to boost their libido, or sexual energy—so they believe—people are prepared to let these magnificent animals be shot and left to rot on the African veldt. The poachers who kill them cannot be totally blamed for this, as they are just one link in the chain, and not the main link, either. Most of them are just poor tribesmen who also need to live, and the possibility of making big money far outweighs the risk of getting caught and prosecuted. No, the buyers and users of the animal products are the real cause of this, and there is no getting away from the fact. Stop the demand, and the supply will cease. What a pity people are so selfish and stupid—much moreso than the animals on which they look down with scorn!

Someone once told me of a high-ranking Tibetan *lama* appearing surprised to learn she was vegetarian, and asked her why. And, far from praising and encouraging her for abstaining from meat, he even disapproved of it (maybe because, being carnivorous himself—and greatly attached to the taste of meat—he took it as a criticism of his habit).

Some years ago, in Malaysia, I was invited to stay in someone's home, where I was served nice vegetarian food. One day, I went into the kitchen to get some water, but my way was barred by the son of the house; his mother was there eating her lunch. She knew I knew she was not

vegetarian, but was embarrassed that I should see her eating meat. However, it was *her* house, not mine; I was only the guest there. If she wanted to eat meat, she should have done so without being ashamed; the fact that she was ashamed was a sign she had reservations about it.

If a person wants to eat meat, let him at least be honest about it and admit he likes it, and not use the scriptures to justify it, as that is cowardly and unscrupulous. Let him also be prepared to accept the consequences of his involvement in killing, without complaining or blaming others for whatever happens to him, for he is surely involved.

Because of Tibet's altitude, few vegetables will grow there and so the diet of the people is largely and unavoidably animal-based. The majority of Tibetans are Buddhists and very pious as such. They scrupulously avoid killing anything—even to the extent of beating firewood vigorously on the ground to shake free any insects before burning it. How, then, do they get the meat they eat? The butchers of Tibet are Muslims, who are regarded by the Buddhists as 'low caste' or 'defiled' because of their livelihood. The Buddhists obviously do not see the discrepancy in their outlook on this, which smells strongly of hypocrisy.

"If you delight in killing, you cannot fulfil yourself," wrote Lao Tsu in the *Tao Te Ching*. Are these just empty words? How shall one attain Enlightenment except by opening one's heart and becoming sensitive to the rights and feelings of others? We do not live by and for ourselves alone. What kind of Enlightenment is it if we are indifferent to the pain and suffering of others? Enlightenment is not just something to be hopefully attained as a result of following the Dharma, but should be something that manifests in our lives as we go about our daily living.

Now, suppose one person here—perhaps you—and another one there, starts to think about this, and reflects thus: "If no-one ate meat or wore furs or skins, the animals would not be killed for such. I do not agree with killing, for the animals have the right to live and do not want to die—

just like me. I can live quite well on vegetables, and so, as a protest against killing and as an expression of sympathy for the animals, I will become vegetarian from now on." Let us further imagine what would happen if the 300,000-plus monks in Thailand—where Buddhism, for the most part, has become passive and moribund—decided to stop eating meat, and asked the lay-people to offer them only vegetarian food: Every day, millions of animals—cows, pigs, goats, chickens, ducks, fish, prawns, etc.—would not be needlessly slaughtered; many lay-people would also probably become vegetarians. But I am happy to report that now, at last, there is a new movement in Thailand which is making quite an impression. The monks of this movement are strict vegetarians, which is something I never expected to see there, but am certainly very happy about. They lead simple lives, free from the modern paraphernalia that fills many of the monasteries these days, and wander around preaching. So there is hope; it all depends upon understanding, and begins with people like you and I.

Many people mistakenly think that, alone, they can do nothing to change the world, and that whatever they might do will make no difference. This is weak-minded, short-sighted and wrong and, because so many people have been touched by the Story of the Stranded Starfish in one of my previous books, I will not ask pardon for repeating it here, so that it might touch others.

Early one morning, a man went to the beach, and, while strolling along there, he noticed, some distance ahead of him, a young boy frequently bending down to pick things up and throw them into the sea. At first, he thought it must be stones the boy was throwing, but as he got nearer to him, he realized it was starfish. When he caught up with the boy, he asked him why he was doing this, and the boy replied that the tide was ebbing and the starfish were stranded on the beach, unable to get back into the water, and would die of exposure as the sun rose higher in the sky and became hotter. The man looked at the starfish all

over the beach, and said: “But there are millions of starfish on this beach; how can your efforts make any difference?” The boy looked at the starfish he was holding, then looked up at the man and said: “It will make a difference to *this* one!” and flung it back into the sea.

Can you put yourself into the place of that starfish? It is most important, on a spiritual path, to be able to identify and empathize with others, including animals.

We cannot force anyone else to change, but we can change ourselves, and thereby change the world, as we are part of the world, and if we change, the world also changes, be it ever so little. Don’t always wait for others to make the first move, therefore; if you are convinced a thing is right, follow it; no matter if it seems that you are all alone, you should know that you are never really alone.

Are you concerned about suffering? If so, you should know that it is not something personal, like your private property, but something common and world-wide. If *you* do not like to suffer, do something. Don’t just call yourself a ‘Buddhist,’ and wait for someone to help you; do something yourself! Calling oneself ‘Buddhist’—or any other name for that matter (this is meant not just for Buddhists)—has very little meaning. But to be aware that we can do something to make our world a little bit better, instead of worse, and to do it, *that* is something! “Morality,” as philosopher George Santayana said, “is the desire to lessen suffering in the world.” Now, what do you think: Does eating meat increase or decrease the suffering in the world?

People become vegetarians for different reasons, but to abstain from eating meat because one thinks it is better for health or for ‘making merit,’ or from the consideration that a chicken or fish might have been one’s relative or friend in a previous lifetime, are not Buddhist reasons for being vegetarian. A Buddhist abstains from eating meat because he knows it is right to abstain, and not from what he might get, personally, from doing so. He is a vegetarian for the sake

of the animals, not for his own sake; he considers the effects of his actions upon others.

Forget about what the Buddha may or may not have said about eating meat; He died a long time ago, and none of us ever met Him. We are not the slaves of the Buddha—or *are* we?—but have minds of our own, which He exhorted us to use. The animals are being killed right now, often with our tacit consent and approval. What do you think about this? While it means food for many, money for others and sport for some, for the animals themselves it means suffering and death. Surely, this deserves some thought. We should not be so subjective, always looking at things from our own viewpoint, wondering how we can make use of things for our own ends. The viewpoint we should look at meat-eating from is that of the animals, is it not? Try to put yourself in their position, and see how it feels.

Now, reading this, some people—monks and non-monks—will probably fall back on the old worn-out argument: "But Buddhist monks are not allowed to ask for anything special for themselves, saying, 'I like this' or 'I don't like that.' They are supposed to eat whatever people are kind enough to offer to them, without making a fuss and causing inconvenience to their supporters." Yes, it is good for monks to refrain from being fussy and choosy, but if they were to request people to offer them only meatless food, they would not be asking for themselves, but for the sake of the animals; their asking would be altruistic instead of selfish. And it would benefit the people who offer as well as the animals, for their offerings would involve less suffering and so would be more meritorious. From every point-of-view, therefore—including health and economy—vegetarianism is better. And, as for the lame excuse that, without eating meat, we would not get enough nourishment and would be weak and sickly, well, what about elephants, horses, cows, buffaloes, etc.? They are herbivorous, and are not weak! It is our minds that are weak, not our bodies! So, why hesitate? Is it because of attachment to taste? Is it because we

might find it inconvenient to change our diet? Do we live to eat, or eat to live? In order for us to eat meat, the animals must be killed. Is that not a great inconvenience for them?

Ah, *attachment*! Some people may counter what I have said above by saying we can be attached to vegetarianism, too, and that attachment is attachment in any form, and ends in suffering; we can be bound just as firmly with gold chains as iron chains, and should follow the Middle Way that avoids extremes. But is this so? Isn't it a matter of *who* and *how*? Following the Middle Way doesn't mean living in a non-committal, wishy-washy manner, without principles or firm foundations; nor does it mean following a set of rules imposed upon us or adopted from outside. Following the Middle Way means living according to our understanding, and trying to keep Dharma at the center as a focal point, *not* self; we can still be flexible while holding fast to the essence and not compromising one's principles; it must come from inside—from realization of how things are—not outside. The Middle Way—or Noble Eightfold Path—on paper, is a general guideline, and must be seen as such; the Way is not in the books, but in walking it, not a concept or doctrine, but a living thing of experience. And some of the Buddha's final words were: "Be an island unto yourself; be a lamp unto yourself; be a refuge unto yourself. With the Dharma as your refuge, look not outside of yourself for a refuge." He did not mean cling to it as a personal possession and become attached to it, considering it a thing of self, but to abide by it, live by it, accord with it, for in so doing, we may break free of the idea of self. And the basic Five Precepts—covering our relationships with other living things (not just people)—are designed to help us refrain from causing suffering.

To understand ourselves—which is what the Dharma is all about—we must see ourselves in context, for alone and in isolation, there is no meaning; we simply do not exist like that. If we follow the Way from fearful self-concern, far from getting what we hope to get, we only cause ourselves more

suffering. To become vegetarian with the idea of getting something in return, such as 'merit,' or better health, demonstrates the kind of attachment that causes suffering; but to do it with the idea of lessening the suffering of others, means abiding in Dharma; we cannot call this attachment.

It is often difficult to talk about vegetarianism to non-vegetarians, for there is always the implication of criticism or disapproval of their meat-eating—indeed, just being vegetarian, without saying a word, is to make a statement—and few of us can accept criticism gracefully, even when it is constructive, as in talk about vegetarianism. But if we refrain from saying what needs to be said because we think people may not like it and therefore might not support us, truth will be fettered and gagged. Is this why there is so little Dharma-propagation in many of the big and rich temples in Asia, where, more often than not, ceremonies and superstition hold center-place, and crowd out all else?

We must sometimes choose between speaking the truth and being popular, as the truth is often unpopular. Maybe this is why Lao Tsu said: *"The wise person hears of the Tao [Way, or Dharma], and follows it carefully. The average person hears of the Tao, and thinks about it now and then. The foolish person hears of the Tao, and laughs aloud. If there were no laughter, the Tao would not be what it is."* Thus, the laughter of fools, who are unable—or *refuse*—to comprehend, is a tribute to Tao. The praise of fools is something more to be concerned about than their laughter, while the criticism and censure of the wise should be taken to heart.

If we wish to propagate Dharma, there is an element of risk involved; we must face the possibility of being unpopu-

lar, as we cannot please everyone, and if we try, we might end up pleasing no-one. We may dilute the Dharma to suit the tastes of those who are unable or unwilling to accept it as it is, but what would happen to the quality? There would hardly be any flavor left!

Many Westerners, new to Buddhism, spontaneously become vegetarians as a result when they hear the teachings about Compassion and Respect for Life. What a pity, therefore, that many allow themselves to be influenced and persuaded into dropping their gentler mode of eating when they come into contact with forms of Buddhism that do not espouse vegetarianism, instead of persisting in it. It's a pity they lack the courage of their convictions, and conform, for the sake of convenience or so as not to be different.

Should we not find out for ourselves what is right and wrong, true and false? In this world of confusion, where it is hard to resist the pressure to conform, if we know a thing to be right, should we not try to abide by it? Not to do so would be to lose the precious little integrity we might have and which we must try to increase. Why should we follow others, like sheep? Is it because we think others always know where they are going, while we do not? Using the Dharma and seeing things as they are, we have a way to develop clearer vision and more self-confidence than this.

To conclude: Just as it is natural for a flower to give off scent, so Vegetarianism should be a natural expression of our understanding that, just as we ourselves wish to be happy and avoid pain, other living things feel exactly the same way. Is it really so esoteric that only very few people are able to comprehend this? I don't think so, and therefore I'll continue to stand up for the animals, and say:

STOP THE KILLING!

BE KIND TO ANIMALS—BY NOT EATING THEM!

BATAAN REVISITED

THE SKY WAS OVERCAST as we left Manila—my two companions and I—on the morning of December 19th 1999 for what used to be the Bataan Refugee Camp—otherwise called *PRPC* or *Philippines Refugee Processing Center* (an odd name that always made me think of a food-canning factory; no wonder many refugees felt they were merely commodities or statistics on paper, without real identities!) They had offered to drive me out, and I had gratefully accepted. Being a Sunday, the traffic wasn't so heavy, and it didn't take us as long to escape from the vortex of the city as it would have done on other days; Manila is so congested that it is choking on its own emissions. It took us 3½ hours to get there, as parts of the road was still in bad shape from the damage caused by the cataclysmic eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991.

When we arrived at the check-point, we were held up for some minutes while the guards checked with their superiors at the Administration Building. Satisfied we had a legitimate reason for visiting the Camp, we were finally allowed in "to visit the temples only"; we got the impression that there must be some secret activities going on there, though what they might have been, we didn't discover and could only guess at.

Proceeding from the check-point, it was as if I had never been there before, as there were no refugee billets in sight, like there used to be, but only thick overgrowth, and many trees where I remembered none. I was somewhat confused, and gave the driver halting directions. We turned into a familiar road that led to the temple in Neighborhood Seven, but it was only with some difficulty that we were able to discern the temple-gateway through the tangled vegetation; in just a few short years, the jungle had taken over again completely.

Forcing a passage through the gateway, we could then see the Kwan Yin (Quan Am) image behind a clump of bamboo I had planted during my last visit in '87; it had not been vandalized, but remained as it was when the Camp closed in '94, its hand raised in perpetually blessing. A marble plaque stood beside it, engraved with the words: DON'T WORRY; IT WILL PASS—EVERYTHING DOES. My last gift to the Camp, I'd had this made and placed there to remind people to hold on and not give way to despair; my hope was that they might think of these words as Kwan Yin's and draw consolation and courage therefrom.

Wary of snakes, we pushed through the weeds and brambles to the image, standing beside the dried-up pond wherein water-lilies used to bloom, and took some photos. Alas, I mused, the artist who had so skillfully crafted this image—his name was *Do Ky*, a humble and softly-spoken man—had died of a heart-attack in California some years after resettling there. When he was creating this image, I asked him not to put his name on it, and he agreed; I said it wasn't necessary for people to know who made it, but just for it to be there, symbolizing hope; there were no names in the temple, except one on a stele that had been erected later in memory of a man who had died when he fell from the roof while working there.

On one side was the grove of mango-trees under which many a refugee had sought shelter from the hot sun, and on the other were the ruins of the temple we had established in '80-'81, and which was later named *Chua Van Hanh*; the roof had gone without a trace, probably to serve other purposes in the nearby town of *Morong*. All that remained were a few termite-riddled pillars that crumbled to the touch, and the Buddha-image—also created by Do Ky—gazing impassively on the desolation.

It would have taken too much of an effort to force our way through the weeds and thorns to where we might look out over the stream and forest behind the temple, so we didn't even try. We did, however, uncover two cement

seats I had set up, with the inscriptions on their tops still legible; one of them read: “The Law of Life is Change ….. “ One seat had cracked in the middle, and a seed had germinated therein, giving rise to a flourishing tree. I had a vision of someone stumbling upon this place centuries in the future, long after it had been forgotten, and thinking they had discovered the remains of an ancient civilization.

We proceeded up through the Camp, passing the place where the Catholic Church had stood; this, too, had gone, but the image of Mary, atop a globe of the Earth, remained. The Camp hospital was there, closed but not overgrown. Next was the Administration Building, with some activity inside; what it is now used for, I was unable to ascertain. Then there was the ICMC building, where the basic-English education of the refugees had its nerve-center. Nearby, too, was the Camp Post Office, which I had nick-named the ‘Lost Office’ because of the large amounts of mail that used to go ‘missing’ there; there are always people to take advantage of any situation to enrich themselves, seemingly unable to put themselves into the positions of those they exploit; what they would not like others to do to them, they are quite willing to do to others.

Up then, past *Freedom Plaza* and the refugee-boats that had been brought from the coast nearby rotting away, those who had escaped from Vietnam in them long settled in other lands; one was little bigger than a rowing-boat, without cover; how brave or foolhardy were the people who had risked everything to cross the sea in that! Many thousands—how many, will never be known—perished in their quest. Life must have been so hard in their homeland for them to embark upon such a hazardous venture!

Following the road onwards, it was hard to imagine that 18,000 people at a time had lived here; their billets had gone without trace, bulldozed, I was told, some years back. The Camp had been divided into ten neighborhoods, each neighborhood having thirty buildings, with ten billets each, and each billet accommodated six people or more; there

they cooked, ate, slept, studied, worried, argued, fought, played, sang, loved, planned, prayed, dreamed, and made do with what they had. During the time I spent there, over 100,000 people from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos passed through, most spending about six months there, but some getting stuck and having to wait much longer; there were others, too, who never left the Camp, but were resettled, sooner than they expected or wanted, in what came to be known as *Neighborhood 11*: the cemetery.

The temple at the top end of the Camp, near Neighborhood Two, was in better shape than the other one; at least, the roof was still on, but the fibro-cement walls, on which the Cambodians had painted scenes from the life of the Buddha, had been smashed; some fragments remained, hanging on the framework. This temple, more than the lower one, bore the marks of my hands, as I had done a lot of work on it myself, and constructed it more sturdily; the octagonal window-frames, that I had decorated with *bodhi-leaves*, were still there. The main painting of the Buddha behind the altar had been partly-destroyed and wore campaign-posters of some politician; one of the Buddha-images had been decapitated.

I searched in vain for the hut I had built and lived in, but was unable to find even the cement floor. I looked, too, for two coconut trees that had grown from nuts left over from some festival we had in 1980, expecting them to be quite tall now, but they had also gone. The Bodhi-tree, however, which I had brought as a tiny sapling plucked from a wall in a temple on the island of Cebu in 1979, and planted in the Camp in 1980, was now big and tall; this tree had been inexplicably cut down by a crazy monk shortly after I had left the Camp, and resulted in the Cambodians taking over the temple from the Vietnamese, but had regrown and was in the process of wrapping itself around and absorbing a small shrine the Cambodians had erected against it.

A Buddha-image—the one made by the Vietnamese when they established the first temple there in 1980,

shortly after the Camp opened—sat in a shed at one side of the temple, together with a larger-than-life image made by the Cambodians later.

Around the trees in what had been the temple-compound were the stones we had positioned there to serve as seats that termites couldn't eat; it was hard to imagine that this area had once been clean and neat.

I walked up to the crest of the hill behind the temple, hoping to look down on where the Camp had been, but this was not possible owing to the trees and shrubbery that enshrouded everything. It did not, however, prevent memories from flooding back into my mind. I 'saw' many old faces there, and thought of their stories, each of them unique; I wonder where they all are now.

Four years of my life I spent in this Camp, watching people come and go, some with little more than the clothes they were wearing. Some few I have seen again in places like the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, Denmark, Norway and Australia; they have changed the world wherever they went, and in turn have been changed.

Life goes on, flows on, like a river, often with no sense of direction, not knowing where it came from, where it is, nor where it is going. We think we are in control of our lives, but are not, and even small things, unexpected and sudden, can change us considerably. If we learned to look at life as an adventure, instead of clinging to it with fearful self-concern, we could enjoy it much more than we do. If, too, we would give up the idea or desire that everything should be *nice*, and tried to see the *good* in it instead, we would learn more than we do. There is white in the black, always. I met people in that Camp (*and* in other Camps), who were quite happy there; not all of them were sad. I also met people later on, in the lands where they had resettled, who told me that they would like to be back in the Refugee Camps, where life was simple and uncomplicated.

My thanks to the kind people who drove me out on my trip of reminiscence to Bataan, and my Best Wishes to all the refugees who passed through that Camp on their way to other lands; they became part of my life just as I became part of theirs.

"That's what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way".

Doris Lessing.

HOLEY GHOST

FOR THOSE UNFAMILIAR with the old Greek myth of Pandora's Box, I would like to briefly retell it here.

Long ago, a king fell in love with and married a beautiful girl named *Pandora*. He gave her everything she wished for, including a key to his treasury, so she could help herself to anything there. He also told her she could go everywhere except into a small room high up in a tower in the east wing; under no circumstances was she to go there.

The king, as kings must, spent a lot of time running his kingdom, and was often away from home, leaving Pandora to her own devices. She missed her husband greatly during his absences and so, to pass the time, took to exploring the palace; she enjoyed this, as every room contained something different. One day, however, after she'd been to all the other rooms, she climbed the tower in the east wing, and came to the room she had been forbidden to enter. Just as she was about to open the door, she recalled what her husband had said, turned and went down the stairs, but not without thinking about what the room might contain.

Curiosity finally overcame her, however, and a few days later, she went up into the tower again, and this time opened the door of the mysterious room, expecting to find wonderful things inside. But the room was empty except for an old oak chest, the likes of which were common in other rooms. As we can imagine, having come this far, she didn't stop there, and went to the chest to lift the lid, but it was very heavy and the hinges were rusty, requiring great effort to raise it. She was unprepared for what happened. As she raised the lid out poured fearsome and horrible creatures—scaly, spiny, horned, slimy, furred and feathered—that crawled, flapped and slithered around the room and out

of the open door, and though she was scared of the repulsive creatures, her fear of what her husband would say impelled her to try to catch and put them back into the box. No sooner did she lift the lid to get one of them in, however, than more escaped. At last, she understood why her husband had warned her to stay away from that room, but it was too late: she had released evil into the world, and it could not be recaptured; it was something that would trouble mankind forever!

Before Pope John Paul II made his November '99 state-visit to India, some right-wing Hindu organizations staged a protest, demanding he apologize for atrocities committed by Portuguese Catholics against Hindus in Goa over 400 years ago in the name of the 'Holy Inquisition.' Obviously unaware that the Pope represents only Catholics, and not the whole spectrum of Christian sects (as popes once did and would like to do again), they also asked him to denounce pressured conversions and pledge that no Christian missionary in India would ever undertake such in the future, claiming that "religious conversion is tantamount to rape." Another of their demands was that he should recognize and declare that Christianity was not the only way to salvation, and say "that all religions lead to God. If and when he says that, all disputes will be over and there will be world peace."

His refusal to do this, and in fact, to call his bishops to spread Christianity throughout Asia, caused India's Prime Minister, Vajpayee, to say he was not concerned by the Pope's call, but warned Christian missionaries against using unethical means to convert people. The secretary of one of the protesting Hindu groups said: "The Vatican cannot convert educated men and thus finds itself grazing the fields of poverty and illiteracy. The Pope is free to preach, but he has no right to preach for conversions. It is an unholy act. Had Jesus

Christ been alive he would not have allowed that. The Hindu religion believes that all paths lead to God and if the Pope had declared that the Bible was not the only way, we would have supported him. But he thinks and says that the Bible is the answer. This is where he is wrong." (The Pope had said, during his address in New Delhi, that Christ is often perceived as 'foreign' in Asia, but that "the peoples of Asia need Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Asia is thirsting for the living water that Jesus alone can give.") The secretary accused the local church of using enticements to lure people to accept Christianity, and reiterated allegations that missionaries were behind insurgencies in India's north-east.

Would those Hindus, I wonder, be somewhat placated with the Pope's astounding announcement of March 12th March 2000, entitled: **Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past**? Although they did not get what they demanded, it is much more than many people—including myself—dreamed possible. Let us look at it somewhat. The Pope, as head of the Catholic Church, has confessed:

1. Faults committed in the service of truth: intolerance and violence against dissidents, wars of religion, violence and abuses of the crusades, coercive methods of the Inquisition.

2. Faults that have compromised the unity of the Body of Christ: excommunications, persecutions and divisions.

3. Faults committed in the area of relations with the people of the First Alliance, Israel: disdain, acts of hostility, silences.

4. Faults against love, peace, the rights of peoples, the respect of cultures and of other religions, committed in the course of evangelization.

5. Faults against human dignity and the unity of the human race: towards women, different races and ethnic groups.

6. Faults in the area of fundamental rights of individuals and against social justice: the downtrodden, the poor, the unborn, social and economic injustices, marginalization.

Usually, when Catholics confess their sins to a priest, they must be specific—what it was, how often they committed it, for example, and with what intention. They must show remorse and a determination not to commit the sin again. Only then may forgiveness and absolution come.

The Pope did not specify the historical sins of Catholics, however, but only generalized. He maintained that whatever evils done were done by Catholics, not by the Church, which remains unsullied. But what is this except a matter of semantics, a twisting of words? There is no organization, no Church apart from the people who compose it.

The Church is the most ruthless and cynical body in the world, and throughout its history, has committed untold crimes against humanity, on an *enormous* scale. And here you have it from the mouth of Vatican official, Bishop Piero Marini: “Given the number of sins committed in the course of 20 centuries, [reference to them] must necessarily be rather summary."

How does the pope's apology—one of several he has made over the past few years, but the most daring so far—help the victims of the Church, who can know nothing about it? This is really about the Church’s need to assuage its own guilty conscience, acknowledge its errors and forgive itself—to put down the burdens of the past so as continue into the Third Millennium of its story. It takes courage and humility to do this, and I respect the pope for that; in my eyes, regardless of what I think of Christianity, it is his attempt to get the Church back on a viable course.

What *were* the sins that this ‘apology’ was supposed to expiate? The most outstanding ones that John Paul II apparently meant were the Crusades, the Inquisition and a terrible inaction and silence during the Holocaust. He himself was not responsible for those dark episodes in the Church, but has inherited the guilt along with his mantle.

How can he blame ‘erring Catholics’ for the Crusades, when it was the Popes of that time who ordered military campaigns over a period of 200 years to restore the ‘Holy Land’ to Christian rule, promising absolution

for those who died in the service of the Cross. These *Un*holy Wars resulted in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Muslims, Jews and Orthodox Christians, apart from Catholic deaths. The 'Holy Inquisition,' too, was a fiend-child of the Vatican, which authorized torture as a means of extracting confessions from 'heretics.' The Church benefited tremendously from such persecutions, as the property of such 'heretics' was confiscated and became the Vatican's; it was really big business.

John Paul II is a remarkable man, and when he dies will leave an impressive record. We may never fully know of the part he played in the collapse of Communism in Europe, but it was considerable, and the world has reason to be grateful for that. He has been planning this apology for years, and must have had to face great internal opposition; there are ruthless people in the Vatican who will stop at nothing to maintain their power; popes have been murdered by their own people for less than that.

How far would he have gone if he were younger and free enough to do it? Might he have rescinded the fanciful notion of *papal infallibility* pronounced by Pope Pius IX in 1864, which, for sheer arrogance and spiritual pride (a *cardinal* or major sin to Catholics) really wins the prize? As an educated man and the most widely-traveled pope in history, can he really believe that? It is a great obstacle in the way of good relations with other religions, and even of his standing as a world-leader; more and more people will question and reject this myth, which is totally out of sync with present times. To explain and justify it, the Vatican had to sift through the New Testament for things to support it. But the New Testament is the most tampered-with book in the world, and that is merely using one myth to support another, and is not at all convincing. Even so, because Christianity is a religion of belief, people will believe what they

want to believe, and as *Will Durant*, the American historian wrote:

"History has justified the Church in the belief that the masses of mankind desire a religion rich in miracle, mystery, and myth. Some minor modifications have been allowed in ritual, in ecclesiastical costume, and in episcopal authority; but the Church dares not alter the doctrines that reason smiles at, for such changes would offend and disillusion the millions whose hopes have been tied to inspiring and consolatory imaginations".

No matter what he would like to do, he is a victim of the past, and his hands are tied. When dogmas and creeds are established, it is hard to repeal them without flying in the face of the underlying claim that the pope is the representative—*Vicar*—of Christ on earth, which is where the idea of infallibility came from; Christ, as the Son of God, is considered perfect, despite the accounts in the Bible that clearly reveal his imperfection.

Until the 4th century, the Bishop of Rome (still one of his titles), was one among many, and recognized by none as 'supreme'; only when he and his successors managed to gain the backing of Constantine and later 'Christian' emperors, did they proclaim themselves so. Bitter dispute about this title went on for centuries and led, eventually, to the irrevocable spilt between the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western Churches (not to mention the Protestant branch), which continues until now. Another title—*Pontifex Maximus*—was appropriated from the Roman emperors, together with the imperial purple, when the Empire was no more; the pope became the most-powerful man in Europe, exacting tribute from princes and kings, and even deposing them at times; they had to bow to his commands, under fear of being excommunicated and thereby losing any chance of going to Heaven.

Another myth is that popes are appointed by God. Nonsense. They are chosen by a *conclave* of Cardinals, meeting and voting in a sealed room until they agree whom to elect; most of them hope to be the one. Such elections have been the result of intense wheeling and dealing, buying and selling, the 'Throne of Peter' often going to the highest bidder, and occupied by men who were in no way religious or spiritually-inclined. Knaves and rascals, murderers and rapists—like the incestuous Rodrigo Borgia—have sat on that hot seat. Many were murdered, some not lasting even a year in office. Yet still they scheme and strive for the position; the lure of power is so great.

I am happy that the Pope has made this stupendous acknowledgement; it is long overdue. But in fact, if the Catholic Church had not been founded on arrogance and ignorance, it might have had nothing to apologize for. Its fear, bigotry and intolerance caused it to do the terrible things that John Paul II now feels it necessary to somehow try to explain away. But it is a subterfuge, and will not work. Unless the Catholic Church changes its basic beliefs, there is no guarantee that it will not do similar things in the future, if and when conditions permit. As is well-known, history repeats itself, and the world is not yet so enlightened that it cannot slip back into the kind of darkness that the Church plunged Europe into for a thousand years after the collapse of the Roman Empire; we should not confuse technology with wisdom or understanding.

The Pope, like Pandora, has opened a box with this Apology, but unlike the things that poured forth from hers, good things have come from the Pope's, and cannot be recaptured. Whether this was his intention or not, it will open the eyes of some people to what has gone on, because although these matters were not secret, many people are ignorant of the past, and history's lessons are wasted on them. This admission—'direct from

the horse's mouth'—is just what the world needs to help it discern the true from the false.

According to my experience—for what it is worth to anyone else—if we are able to reject the Judeo-Christian idea of God, which is childishly anthropomorphic, we find a strength to deal with whatever life throws at us, in place of the drug-like dependence on a fairy-tale, as before. I am actually grateful to my Christian upbringing, as it gave me something to reject; it became like the platform from which to launch a rocket, without which the rocket could not take off. And, to extract something positive from it is like Michelangelo looking at the block of flawed marble that had long stood in a Florence square, unwanted and unused. He saw the flaw in it, but he also saw David, and, acquiring permission to use the block, drew David out by removing from the stone everything that was not-David. Another analogy: it is like someone prospecting for gold in a stream: he scoops his basin into the stream-bed, pours off the water, removes the pebbles, the twigs, the sand, the mud, and then, when everything that is not gold has been removed, he might find some tiny specks of gold remaining; he does not begin by taking out the specks of gold. Truth is not approached by starting with a set of preconceptions about it—with minds already made up—but by a process of negation: not this, not that.

AND NOW, TO ME

ALTHOUGH I WOULD PREFER not to write about this, as it concerns things that others cannot verify, I am so often asked about it that it would save me much time and repetition to explain a little bit about what led me to become a monk, insofar as I can perceive a pattern in it all looking back. Let me say, though, that I tell my story here only that some of it might be useful to others, and inspire some to look into their own unique stories.

As might be supposed of me as a European, I was born into a Christian background, and raised a believer of that religion. I was taken to Sunday School, although I didn't always like to go, as I had a rebellious nature from the beginning, it seems. But I *did* believe, read the Bible, pray and considered myself a Christian, if not actually a follower of Jesus; at that age, I didn't know there were alternatives. I'm willing to admit, however, that my knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Jesus was scanty, and I do not claim to have applied them in my life; perhaps, at that time, I didn't know that religion was meant to be practiced, as it wasn't—and still isn't—commonly done.

My childhood ended and I entered my teens still believing in Christianity. This continued until I left school when, like so many young people when they discover the big wide world beyond school walls, I found other things of interest, and my religion just 'fell away'; it was not that I deliberately discarded it or converted to another religion, but that it ceased to interest me. I remained in this state for some years, not thinking about religion.

My working-life in England was as unsatisfying as had been my school days; I felt I didn't belong in the land of my birth, and was a stranger or an alien there. Reasons—or possible reasons—for this will become apparent as I go on with this account.

So, because of my alienation, I left England, and began to hitch-hike around Europe, not knowing where I was going nor why. All I knew was that I had to go, and couldn't stay. It was hard to leave and set off into foreign parts, knowing no language other than my native tongue, with little money, no friends, no place to stay except where night found me—in woods, parks, empty houses, under bridges, in upturned-boats on beaches, etc.; I was often hungry, lonely, wet, cold and afraid. This was in 1965, and I was 18 years old.

This first trip, however, though it wasn't long before I returned to England, gave me the confidence to go again; I had found my wings and could fly, and the world was henceforth open to me.

Subsequent travels took me to many strange and wonderful places, and my horizons were pushed back. I wandered farther and farther, reaching the history-soaked city of Istanbul, with its unique and unforgettable setting on the *Bosphorus*, the *Golden Horn*, and the *Sea of Marmara*. With splendor and beauty all around, and an omnipresent feeling of antiquity, it was easy to overlook the squalor that also abounded there.

Crossing the Bosphorus, I stood for the first time in Asia, with undreamed-of adventures ahead. My path ran through Eastern Turkey to Iran, or ancient Persia, which at that time, was still under the rule of the Shah; the ayatollah had not yet seized power. Passing through Tabriz and Teheran and skirting the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, I reached Afghanistan, where the people were living much as they had done for centuries, little touched and influenced by Western civilization, until devastation descended on them from the north, when the Soviet Union invaded but never defeated this proud and fiercely-independent nation.

Afghanistan, too, I left behind, and plunged through the Khyber Pass down to the searing heat of Pakistan's plains, but there was little there to hold me, and so I pressed on, to

enter the land that had beckoned me from afar for so many years: Hindustan: *INDIA*.

But the country I was drawn to, as if by a magnet, was not modern India, with its teeming millions, the blight of urban sprawl, and the garishness with which it tries to hide the poverty, filth and degradation, as that is like a nightmare; no, what had called me was ancient India, and it took some adjustment on my part before I discovered this through and beyond post-independence India.

My story must needs be shortened and condensed, or it will become a book in itself. Suffice it to say that while wandering around India in 1970, visiting ancient places—some of which date back 2000 years and more—I came to the cave-temples, or rather, monasteries, of Ellora, north-east of Bombay in rugged and dry countryside. This complex comprises Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain caves, carved out of a cliff-face over a period of maybe a thousand years, and renowned, worldwide, for their size, splendor, and art. As monasteries, they are deserted now, but are preserved as national monuments, open to the public.

I already knew something of Hinduism at that time, as it is the majority-religion of India, and was impressed by its scope and concepts of Karma and Reincarnation; compared with what I had been taught of Christianity, it was like standing on a mountain-top looking at the world below in all directions, while before, it had been like looking at the world through a key-hole; the single-life-on-Earth belief is very narrow and unsatisfying, raising more questions and doubts than it answers.

At Ellora, I felt a thrill, as if something had awoken in me. As yet, I knew nothing of Buddhism, had met no Buddhists, and though I had with me a book on Buddhism, I had not read it. The only thing I thought I knew about Buddhism was that the Buddha was a great fat man who sat beneath a tree, waiting for people to come along and feed him; where I got this erroneous idea, I don't remember. So, it cannot be said that I was looking for Buddhism, or that I

found it; it might be better to say that *it* found me. At Ellora, therefore, I was first stirred by Buddhism, but this was not the beginning; I can trace it further back from there, as I will presently show.

From Ellora, I went to Ajanta, a group of thirty caves—all Buddhist—100 kms away. It was late when I reached the access-road, however, so I spread my sleeping-mat under a tree, oblivious of the fact that this area is inhabited by tigers, and went to sleep.

When I awoke, I felt a sharp pain on the sole of my right foot, and upon investigation in the pre-dawn half-light, discovered a white spot about the size of a ten-cent coin, which was hard and extremely sensitive. Because I'd been walking barefoot, I must have trodden on a thorn the day before, but I didn't recall having done so; maybe, at the time, I thought it was just a sharp stone. (Some days later, my left foot was pierced by a thorn, with a similar effect, so I guessed the first wound had been caused that way. Thorn-hedges are common in India, and the thorns thereon are very long and poisonous).

It was difficult to stand and walk on my pierced foot, so, thinking to alleviate the pain, I cut open the spot with a sharp knife to let out the pus, applied some ointment, bandaged it with a strip of cloth, and set off to walk the remaining distance to the Caves; I must have looked like a leper hobbling along in pain with my bandaged foot. But perhaps because of the pain and the effort needed to walk, when I got there, I was 'high,' and entered the caves with mindfulness and awe. Proceeding from cave to cave, many with images, frescoes and long-abandoned monks' cells, I had a strong feeling—a conviction, even—that I was coming home again after being away for a long time. Did I bring this upon myself, did the pain in my foot have anything to do with it, or was it something welling up from my subconscious? I cannot say for sure, but it was a great turning-point in my life, and I felt that whatever had caused men to carve these magnificent sanctuaries out of the cliff-face,

this was it for me. From wandering around without a direction in my life, I now knew which way to go; I had a light to guide me. Because of this, Ajanta, even more than Ellora, is a place of great significance to me.

Two days later, with my foot still bandaged and in pain, I went to *Sanchi*, in Central India, which is the site of several well-preserved Buddhist *stupas*, or reliquary monuments, the largest of which was constructed to enshrine the bodily-relics of the Buddha's two chief disciples, *Sariputra* and *Moggallana*. I felt awed by the atmosphere of sanctity that lingers at this place, but was also appalled at the lack of respect of Indian visitors to the place, some of whom I saw clambering on top of the main stupa to have their photos taken. Perhaps it is because India has an abundance of ancient and holy places, and people have grown used to them and take them for granted, without understanding or appreciating them.

Walking down the road from the sacred hill of Sanchi, trying to catch a ride to Bhopal, suddenly, I 'disappeared'—that is, my body was there, as normal, but the ego, or the sense of 'I, me, mine,' was not, and my consciousness exploded or expanded (though these words are inadequate as they imply time, and the experience was something timeless), to infinity (and this word is also unsuitable, as we can't really talk about infinity, being so finite ourselves). Knowing nothing, as yet, of such things, even by reading, I saw, felt, or experienced life as a whole, with no barriers or limits, and knew where the center of the Universe was/is: *HERE*. This was accompanied by an intense feeling of joy and love such as I had never known before; I felt at one with everything, and that I could have communicated with even a blade of grass. It was a most illuminating experience, and I wanted so much to share it with someone, but there was no-one there to share it with, and even if there had been, would they have been able to understand if they had not had the same experience? I am not saying or implying that I became enlightened thereby, and it should not

be thought so, but it was definitely a transcendental or enlightenment experience. It didn't last, of course—maybe because I couldn't sustain it—and I fell back; but it left me with an unshakable conviction about what I had seen: that we are not this small and narrow thing that we call 'I,' 'me,' and 'mine,' but something much, much more.

Soon after this, I read the book that I had been carrying around with me, entitled simply: *Buddhism*, by *Christmas Humphries*, and I must here acknowledge my gratitude to the late founder-president of the London Buddhist Society, as his words and explanations made complete sense to me, and left me in no doubt whatsoever that what I had stumbled upon just a short time before was the way which I should henceforth try to follow. It wasn't a matter of belief, for I had seen and experienced it.

From there, it was not much of a choice to make to become a monk; it seemed the logical thing in order to realize what I had glimpsed. But it didn't happen immediately, because I wished first to visit my parents who had recently migrated to Australia, to see how they were settling into their new country, and inform them that I would be returning to India to become a monk, for that is where I thought it would take place.

It didn't turn out as I expected, however, for though I did visit my parents in Australia, told them of my intentions, and got their consent, I got only as far as Malaysia, on my way back to India, before ordination overtook me, and I must express my gratitude to the Venerable Phra Kru Dhammabarnchanvud, of the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Center in Penang, for his kindness to me before and after he ordained me. May he be well and happy, wherever he now is! (I have mentioned him in another article in this book—an article that I wrote later than this one—telling how things had changed for him).

I must backtrack many years, to my childhood, where two things of significance stand out, and which seem now, looking back, to throw some light on what happened later:

One, in a family of meat-eaters, I never liked to eat meat. By itself, this is not remarkable, as many kids don't like to eat meat. But, combined with the second factor, it is significant: I always wanted to go to India—where vegetarianism is widespread—although I consciously knew nothing at all about India, and none of my family had ever been there (nor did I know anyone who had). Yet India never ceased to call me over the years, until I finally answered its call and went, and that is where I stumbled across the Buddha's Way and knew that it was right for me. Surely, it was not an accident. Was I meeting something I had known in a previous life? It would be easy to say that, but I cannot, because I have not seen the link, clearly and directly. Yet neither do I reject the possibility, and in fact, find it quite a reasonable explanation. All I can say is 'maybe,' Was I pulled out or pushed out of England, or both? Until this moment, I don't know; all I know is that I could not stay, but had to go, and set off in search of something, even though I didn't know what I was searching for, or even that I *was* searching! Only when I found it did I realize that I had been searching. And on the way, I encountered many difficulties; it was not an easy search.

So, these were the conditions—or some of them—that brought me into contact with the Buddha's Way, and I have many people to thank for helping me in ways both big and small, before, during, and after that time; many I remember, most I do not, as there were just so many. And I am even grateful to a thorn, for the part it played in my life.

And now, my purpose in life is to help others expand their consciousness beyond the narrow confines of self, and discover that life is to be lived not just for ourselves, but with the awareness that we belong, and should live with love and care.

A TASTE OF LIBERATION

"Just as the great ocean has but one taste—the taste of salt, so my teachings have but one taste—that of liberation."

The Buddha

Embarking on frail, unseaworthy boats to cross the ocean, countless Vietnamese people risked everything in search of the freedom they did not have in Vietnam. I ask them, in the lands where they resettled: "Have you found that which you sought?" Some say "Yes," while others say "No." Many have discovered problems they did not know before. Some even said to me: "Here, we have money, house, car, good food and clothes, but we are not happy, because we have no time, and we would like to be back in the Refugee Camps again!"

In the same way as the horizon recedes as we move towards it, so the object of our search eludes us, leaving us frustrated and unfulfilled; the heaven we dream of never materializes, and we feel let down. In a world of relativity and change, we look for things to hold onto that will not change and let us down, but this is futile, and only causes more frustration and suffering. We should know the nature of that which we seek, so that unrealistic expectations do not disappoint us.

Most Indian religions—Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, at least—teach about Enlightenment and Liberation (*Moksha*), and maintain it is something absolute, that will release us from the realm of Change (*Samsara*). Now, just as the word 'happiness' disturbs our minds and causes unhappiness, so this concept, if grasped at and not understood, may be detrimental to our mental equilibrium. We set our sights too high, and fail to see what is right in front of us. Do we know, by our own experience, that there is such a thing as perfect or absolute Liberation? Or do we

just believe and hope there is? We have accepted someone else's word for it, haven't we? And so we live in conflict with what is. We do not know.

In the U.S., Australia or Europe, there is more freedom than in Vietnam and many other countries, but nowhere is there complete freedom; restrictions and limitations of various kinds always hem us in. And if there are not external limitations, there are the natural limitations of the body: we need food, water, air and many other things, merely to survive; we are not free, physically, and never can be. Nor are our minds free, as we are conditioned in so many ways, habituated, dependent and addicted, as upon drugs. We say we are searching for freedom or liberation, but what do these words mean? Do they have any meaning at all?

I do not know, and cannot say, if there really is complete Enlightenment or Liberation, and I don't want to speak from the books, but I do know we can push back the barriers and become more enlightened and liberated than we are now, and half-a-loaf is better than none; it is not a matter of all or nothing. Moreover, because I have experienced it myself, I can show it to others, too.

I once wrote—in one of my books—that I do not like to talk of reincarnation or rebirth because I have no direct experience of it and so am not qualified to talk of it; we are qualified to talk of things only if we've experienced them. But I also wrote that the world is made up of ideas, many of which are wrong and some even bad, and that if we can change wrong ideas and replace them with right or better ideas, the world will improve thereby. Now, I can see how narrow ideas affect us and cause us to suffer, and so it is my responsibility to write about it, as I want the world to improve. *I care.* How about you?

We live behind walls of wrong ideas—ideas such as racism, nationalism, religious fanaticism and sexism, for example. We can see what trouble such ideas cause in the world, because the way we think determines the way we

act; actions are preceded by thought. If we can change or overcome some of our wrong and narrow ideas, we can avoid much trouble, and the world will be a better place for all to live in. Should we not try to do this?

The 'one-life only' theory—such as forms the basis of some religions—is like looking at the world through a key-hole, and not only makes no sense, but is horrific. The belief that some of us are chosen by 'God,' while others are damned, has been, and still is, productive of great trouble. Is it not time we saw through such divisive beliefs and left them behind, as vestiges of our primitive past? They are not supported by life as we now know it, or by Science. Religion must be based upon reality, upon facts, not upon wishful thinking and superstition.

The concept of reincarnation is radically different than that, as might be supposed, and provides us with a broader and clearer view, like looking at the world from a mountain-top. It is both very old and widespread, and can be found even in places where we would hardly expect to find it—in the Christian Bible, for example, where there are several references to it in the teachings of Jesus. Be that as it may, it is still not true for us unless and until we have experienced it directly, and can therefore honestly say: "I know this to be so." But a thing doesn't have to be true in order to be good, does it? Even if this concept is not true, it is still good, in what it implies, because, just suppose it *is* true, that this is not our first life, and that we have lived many times before: Is it likely that we have always been born in the same place, of the same race and nationality as in this life, of the same sex, and into the same religion? Would it not be more probable that we have lived all over the world, now of this race and nationality, and now of that; now as a follower of this religion, and now of that; now male, and now female? This idea leaves no room at all for egocentric feelings of "My race / nationality / religion is better than yours," or "Men are superior to women," that we come across so often. How would people of the 'far-right,' like the

hate-filled neo-nazis, feel if they could be shown (or reflect upon the possibility) that in a previous life they were of a race or group that they now despise?

Most people who subscribe to the idea of reincarnation merely believe, however, and never bother to investigate and examine; not surprisingly, they remain prisoners of belief, narrow and proud of their race and nationality, feeling superior, and looking down on others. They derive no benefit from this positive concept, and get no nearer to liberation; in fact, they become further enslaved.

Come now, did you choose your nationality, race and gender? Did you decide to be born where you were born? Though this was something you had no control over whatsoever, it was no accident (there are no accidents, things that happen by themselves); it happened to you as a result, no doubt, of innumerable causes, like everything else, and brought with it a tremendous burden of conditioning; we think and live according to patterns determined by our birth. In this life, I was born in England; where *you* were born, I don't know. But do we know *why* we were born *where* we were born? We do not, do we? This is where liberation from the narrow and limiting ideas begins: by realizing that we don't know, our egoism and false sense of certainty and pride is shaken, and when this happens we can begin to open up, and discover what it means to be human.

Science tells us now that all the atoms that compose our bodies are replaced every seven years; if this is so, it means that all the 'English' atoms of my body went long ago, so what is English about me? 'English' is only an idea, and, since I found something much bigger and better than that, I do not think of myself as English any more, but simply a human-being. Having wandered and sojourned in many countries, the atoms in my body now have assembled here from many sources; I am, indeed, a citizen of the world, and belong nowhere in particular; no place has an exclusive claim on me.

At the root of all our problems with others, of course, is the idea of self as distinct from others, and so, to attain greater liberation, this must be seen as the illusion it is, and left behind; there *is* no separate, unchanging essence that we can call 'I' and 'mine.' To realize this, however, requires much deeper insight than I have been talking about in this article; my purpose here is to help people get started on the journey, not to take them to the destination. When we have tasted liberation, we may want to go further, but until then, we may be content to remain as we are. "By doubt, we come to inquiry, and by inquiry, we come to truth."

If we are concerned about Truth—if there *is* such a thing—we should know that belief is a great obstacle, as it fills our minds and prevents us from seeing.

We believe when we do not know;
When we know, we do not believe.

Liberation means the overcoming, or transformation, of ignorance and prejudice; it is something of the mind. Seng Ts'an, the great third Patriarch of Zen in China, in his poem, *The Faithful Mind* wrote:

There's no need to search
for the Truth;
just clear your beliefs
away.

We are not as fettered and bound as we think we are; we have some choice. Why not choose Liberation instead of bondage?

Two men looked out from
prison-bars:
One saw mud, the other saw
stars.

BECAUSE I CARE

INSIGHT, BY THE NATURE METHOD

(An extract from Ven. Buddhadasa's book, *HANDBOOK FOR MANKIND*).

"In this chapter we shall see how concentration may come about naturally on the one hand, and as a result of organized practice on the other. The end result is identical in the two cases: the mind is concentrated and fit to be used for carrying out close introspection. One thing must be noted, however: the intensity of concentration that comes about naturally is usually sufficient and appropriate for introspection and insight, whereas the concentration resulting from organized training is usually excessive, more than can be made use of. Furthermore, misguided satisfaction with that highly developed concentration may result. While the mind is fully concentrated, it is likely to be experiencing such a satisfying kind of bliss and well-being that the meditator may become attached to it or imagine it to be the Fruit of the Path. Naturally-occurring concentration, which is sufficient and suitable for use in introspection, is harmless, having none of the disadvantages inherent in concentration developed by means of intensive training.

"In the *Tripitaka*, there are numerous references to people attaining naturally all states of Path and Fruit. This generally came about in the

presence of the Buddha Himself, but also happened later with other teachers. These people did not go into the forest and sit, assiduously practicing concentration on certain objects in the way described in later manuals.

"Clearly, no organized effort was involved when the first five disciples of the Buddha attained *arahantship* on hearing the Discourse on Non-Selfhood, or by the one-thousand hermits on hearing the Fire Sermon. In these cases, keen, penetrating insight came about quite naturally. These examples clearly show that natural concentration is liable to develop on its own while one is trying to understand clearly some question, and that the resulting insight, as long as it is firmly established, must be quite intense and stable. It happens naturally, automatically, in just the same way as the mind becomes concentrated the moment we set about arithmetic. Likewise in firing a gun, when we take aim, the mind automatically becomes concentrated and steady. This is how naturally-occurring concentration comes about. We normally overlook it completely because it does not appear the least bit magical, miraculous, or awe-inspiring. But through the power of just this naturally-occurring concentration, most of us could actually attain liberation. We could attain the Fruit of the Path,

Nirvana, *arahantship*, just by means of natural concentration.

"So don't overlook this naturally-occurring concentration. It is something most of us either already have, or can readily develop. We have to do everything we can to cultivate and develop it, to make it function perfectly and yield the appropriate results, just as did most of the people who succeeded in becoming *arahants*, none of whom knew anything of modern concentration techniques.

"Now let us look at the nature of the states on inner awareness leading up to full insight into 'the world', that is, into the five aggregates. The first stage is joy (*piti*), mental happiness or spiritual well-being. Doing good in some way, even giving alms—considered the most-basic form of merit-making—can be a source of joy. Higher up, at the level of morality, completely blameless conduct by way of word and action brings an increase in joy. Then in the case of concentration, we discover that there is a definite kind of delight associated with the lower stages of concentration.

"This rapture has in itself the power to induce tranquillity. Normally, the mind is quite unrestrained, continually falling slave to all sorts of

thoughts and feelings associated with enticing things outside. It is normally restless, not calm. But as spiritual joy becomes established, calm and steadiness are bound to increase in proportion. When steadiness has been perfected, the result is full concentration. The mind becomes tranquil, steady, flexible, manageable, light and at ease, ready to be used for any desired purpose, in particular for the elimination of the defilements.

"It is not a case of the mind's being rendered silent, hard and rocklike. Nothing like that happens at all. The body feels normal, but the mind is especially calm and suitable for use in thinking and introspection. It is perfectly clear, perfectly cool, perfectly still and restrained. In other words, it is fit for work, ready to know. This is the degree of concentration to be aimed for, not the very deep concentration where one sits rigidly like a stone image, quite devoid of awareness. Sitting in deep concentration like that, one is in no position to investigate anything. A deeply concentrated mind cannot practice introspection at all. It is in a state of unawareness and is of no use for insight. DEEP CONCENTRATION IS A MAJOR OBSTACLE TO INSIGHT PRACTICE. To practice introspection one must first return to the shallower levels of concentration; then one can make use of the power the

mind has acquired. Highly-developed concentration is just a tool. In this developing of insight by the nature method, we don't have to attain deep concentration and sit with the body rigid. Rather, we aim at a calm, steady mind, one so fit for work that when it is applied to insight practice, it gains right understanding with regard to the entire world. Insight so developed is natural insight, the same sort as was gained by some individuals while sitting listening to the Buddha expounding Dharma. It is conducive to thought and introspection of the right kind, the kind that brings understanding. And it involves neither ceremonial procedures nor miracles.

"This doesn't mean, however, that insight will arise instantaneously. One can't be an arahant straight off. The first step in knowledge may come about at any time, depending once again on the intensity of the concentration. It may happen that what arises is not true insight, because one has been practicing wrongly or has been surrounded by too many false views. But however it turns out, the insight that does arise is bound to be something quite special, for instance, extraordinarily clear and profound. If the knowledge gained is right knowledge, corresponding with reality, corresponding with Dharma, then it will progress, developing ultimately into right and true knowledge of all phe-

nomena. If insight develops in only small measure, it may convert a person into an *ariyan* at the lowest stage; or if it is not sufficient to do that, it will just make him a high-minded individual, an ordinary person of good qualities. If the environment is suitable and good qualities have been properly and adequately established, it is possible to become an arahant. It all depends on the circumstances. But however far things go, as long as the mind has natural concentration, this factor called insight is bound to arise and to correspond more or less closely with reality. Because we, being Buddhists, have heard about, thought about and studied the world, the five aggregates and phenomena, in the hope of coming to understand their true nature, it follows that the knowledge we acquire while in a calm and concentrated state will not be in any way misleading. It is bound to be always beneficial.

"The expression 'insight into the true nature of things' refers to transcience, unsatisfactoriness and non-selfhood, seeing that nothing is worth getting, nothing is worth being, seeing that no object whatsoever should be grasped at and clung to as being a self or as belonging to a self, as being good or bad, attractive or repulsive. Liking or disliking anything, even if it is only an idea or a memory, is clinging. To say that nothing is worth getting or being is the same as to

say that nothing is worth clinging to. ‘Getting’ refers to setting one’s heart on property, position, wealth, or any pleasing object. ‘Being’ refers to the awareness of one’s status as husband, wife, rich man, poor man, winner, loser, or human being, or even the awareness of being oneself. If we really look deeply at it, even being oneself is no fun, is wearisome, because it is a source of suffering.”

[The late Buddhadasa was one of Thailand’s most famous monks].

THE END

Our religions, philosophies or systems of thought have so far failed to produce what we hoped for: Enlightenment.

Can we — *dare* we — at this stage of our lives, look at our religions and systems and ask ourselves if there might be something wrong with them? Or are we to always put ourselves down and assume that the fault is on our part? Or will we go on in the hope that somehow, we might just 'muddle through'?

Our systems, our ways, have become so sacrosanct to us that we are afraid to question them, as they seem to be all we've got. While we cling to them, however, they act as obstacles and prevent us from seeing things clearly. The raft is for crossing the river, not for carrying on one's back.

Ask, look, inquire; don't simply believe!