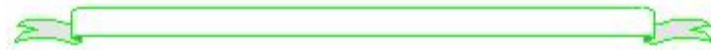


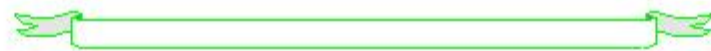
**THIS, TOO, WILL PASS**

***BEACHCOMBER***



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## **INTRODUCTION**

LIFE IS PRECARIOUS AND UNSURE; anything can happen at any time, without a moment's warning; we live under the illusion that we are in control of our lives, but something tiny, trivial or unexpected can easily upset our best-laid plans and throw us into confusion. The surface of our Earth is like a skin stretched tight over a molten core, and may quiver and quake at any time, as it did recently in Turkey, killing tens of thousands, each of whom, like us, had their plans, hopes, fears and aspirations. Storms, floods and droughts wreak havoc; tidal waves cause devastation; disease stalks relentlessly. The only difference between now and millions of years ago, when such things happened, is that we can somewhat predict them and take precautions; also, we understand that they are natural phenomena arising from causes, and do not attribute them to supernatural agencies, as did our primitive ancestors, who sought solace and protection by prayer and sacrifice. Science has enlarged our world, pushed back barriers, and liberated us from the age of naïveté and ignorance, although many people find this uncomfortable, and prefer to close their eyes, deny what is, and live in illusion.

Where can we turn for security? We still grope blindly, searching for this elusive thing, just as the ancients searched for the 'philosopher's stone' which would—they believed—enable them to turn base metals into gold. Well, there never was such a thing and there is not now. We have evolved and should be mature-enough to see how things are and accept the fact that life *is* insecure; insecurity is the primary condition under which we live. And by understanding and accepting this, we acquire a degree of flexibility and find, within the mind, something of that which we sought outside. It is a matter of strug-

gling for something rather than against it. Security is to be found inside, not outside.

“Inside *me*?” some people will ask incredulously. “How can it be inside *me*? I’m a sinner, a miserable sinner!” It’s incredible, but some people—*many* people—still think like this, and believe that anything good can only come from outside them, from something higher and better than themselves, something they imagine will do everything for them if they only believe and grovel before it. It allows them to avoid doing what only they can do for themselves, and when it doesn’t happen, they fall back on what they’ve been saying all along: that they are sinners and do not deserve it; it’s a foregone conclusion.

I maintain that for religion to be viable today, it must be based upon reality, not upon conjecture, fear, or wishful thinking. It must be something we can experience and use in our relationships, something practical of the Here-and-Now, not simply a name to identify with. It must be something that imbues us with a sense of moral responsibility, that frees us from blaming others for whatever happens to us; it must help us accept, graciously and gratefully, our achievements, knowing that our ability to achieve anything has been created by all the generations before us, gradually evolving from what people were like early on to what we have become; we are here now like this because they were there then like that, *not* as a result of our own efforts. I have tried to present it as such in this book, the first edition of which appeared in 1990 under the title, *TURNING THE WHEEL*. Only 2000 copies were printed, and they were long ago distributed, so this year, I decided to rewrite and upgrade it; while doing so, a new title came to my mind: *THIS, TOO, WILL PASS*, in line with the basic law of life: Change. Apart from the few new articles, the old ones in this edition remain practically the same.

England, 1999.





## WHO ARE YOU?

**M**ANY PROBLEMS stem from the fact that we do not know who we really are; we have an identity problem, and it is the greatest of them all, as it causes us to feel lost, confused, alone and alienated from the rest of existence, and in turn leads to fear, tension, irritability, aggression and violence.

The problems we face today are not accidental; like everything else, they come from causes, which can be traced, and solutions to them found, though this, of course, might not be easy. It's easier to say: "It's not *my* problem; it's the responsibility of the authorities, of the government. *I don't care!*" And this apathy, indifference and thoughtlessness are responsible for the continuation and growth of the problems. If we say or think: "This is not my country; I wasn't born here, and I'm not going to stay here forever, therefore I have no responsibility towards it", we're only expressing small-mindedness and ignorance. Yes, maybe we were not born here—wherever *here* might be—you and I, and it *is* sure we're not going to stay here forever, because we're going to die—and probably sooner than we expect!—but we are living here now, as members of the community, are we not? Ponder on this for a moment, and see what it means. Action should be undertaken through understanding, not through greed, fear, or compulsion by others.

Today, it is possible, through the wonderful technology we have developed (and, hopefully, will learn to control), to eliminate most of the problems facing us. Many diseases have been defeated, and we shall, in time, find cures for others, including the scourges of cancer and AIDS. Education is now within the reach of most people. We have the technical means to transform deserts into farmlands, to farm and harvest the sea much more systematically and viably than at present, and on a renewable basis, and so banish the specter of famine. By

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cloud-seeding—which, granted, is still in its experimental stage—we can bring rain to drought-stricken areas. The population-explosion and the problems that arise from it, is not without solution. With foresight and careful management, there would be enough of the world's bounty for everyone. Actually, what is lacking is not food, money, fuel, housing, etc., but Wisdom. It has been cast out, rejected, shunted aside and overwhelmed by Egoism, that part of our mind which makes us cry so loudly: "I, Me, Mine", and brings us into conflict with other fragments of life that think and feel the same way, and makes us try to dominate others, not seeing that, while we *do* have an individual self to take care of, it is part of the greater self, or the communal *WE*. Had it not been for our blindness and egoism, which caused countless mass-murders and destruction known as war (and there are always numerous such gross stupidities raging in different parts of the world, with some ending and others starting all the time), we would have reached the stars long ago. However, it is not *outer-space* we need to conquer and control, but *inner-space*: ignorance, selfishness, egoism.

There is little possibility of you and I leaving our Earth and going into Space in this lifetime, and we may not be among the ranks of scientists, technicians, writers, statesmen, philanthropists and philosophers striving to improve things, but we need not feel left out of their efforts and advances, for we are of the same society, the same world. The dangers we face are surely very great, and we shouldn't pretend otherwise, even though the threat of Communism has disappeared and become a spent force. We are still living on the edge of a volcano that may erupt anytime, and *this* one—Religious Fundamentalism and Fanaticism—is potentially far more dangerous than the Communist threat ever was, for Communists had a vital interest in avoiding all-out war, by reason of their materialistic philosophy and belief in this world only; were they to lose 'this world', they would lose everything. Religious nuts, on the con-

## WHO ARE YOU? }

trary, are quite willing to sacrifice 'this world'—which they consider 'unreal'—in hope of the 'next world', where they believe they will go if they die for their religion; so they have little to lose and everything to gain. However, although this danger is increasing, we should not let it paralyze us with fear; the future is not completely black, by any means, and it is heart-warming to see that, in spite of the disagreements and antagonisms between the great powers, there is still exchange of vital medical, scientific and cultural information, and hope of further improved relations; we are not completely isolated from each other, and the more contact we have, the less prejudice and intolerance there will be.

The world-wide response to disasters in various parts of the world will hopefully result in people becoming less suspicious and hostile, and realize that we cannot live shut off in isolation. The Buddha's Teachings on hate only being overcome by love, are still valid today, although its results might not be immediately apparent. Many intractable cases would respond more to understanding and love than to force.

To experience the joys of crossing barriers we must first remember the wonders that human-beings have achieved throughout the ages, and things that, only 50 years ago or less, people might have scoffed at if someone had told them of, but which we now accept and take for granted as everyday facts. Secondly, we must see the need for improvement, and not wish things to remain as they are, which means stagnation. Thirdly, with our feet firmly on the ground in the present, we must have a vision of how things might be in the future, and of the part we could play in bringing them into being.

It is imperative to see ourselves as part of the community; if we do not, cannot or will not, we shall continue to feel cut off, isolated, and left behind, like fish stranded on the beach by the ebbing tide. We can all see the disasters that have ensued by the division of humanity into ever-smaller groups; but now that

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improved communications have made the world more open, let us see what will happen if we scrap some of our mental barriers and identify with Humanity as a whole. Actually, we already do this, and far more than we realize, as it is mostly done unconsciously. By means of things we use daily, we are in contact with people all over the world; our lives overflow with things made by people of other nations and races. It would be foolish to say: "I will not use this-or-that because it was made by people of another race or nationality", wouldn't it?

**W**e all have names, but who are our names for? They are like fashion-clothes, which people wear more for others—so others may see them wearing them and be impressed—than for themselves; women use make-up for the same reason. If we lived all alone, like Robinson Crusoe on his desert island, we would not worry about the latest fashions, being content to clothe ourselves in the most-practical way possible. Likewise, what need would there be for names if there was nobody to use them? We would think of ourselves as "I", "me", or maybe "you"—as when I sometimes say to myself: "Oh, you silly man!" So, our names are more for others than for ourselves, which means that there is, in everyone, at least a recognition of the existence of others, that we do not live alone in this world; and this belies the antisocial attitude of many of us. Man is a gregarious animal by nature, and there are very few of us who would like to live—or who *could* live—alone for long. We need others. Isn't this worthy of some thought and consideration?

If called upon to tell your life-story without mentioning anyone else, you would be able to say almost nothing, for your life is made up—like a tapestry—of innumerable threads that are 'not-you'; our lives are not simply 'ours', but in fact, mostly 'not-ours'. Anyone—and *anything*—that we meet, who crosses our path, or impinges upon us in any way, becomes part of our experience, or what we think of as 'our life'. In reality, therefore, there is no such thing as 'my life', but an extremely rich and

## WHO ARE YOU? }

varied composition of so many things. Look how it happens: just by reading or hearing these words I am writing, people are taking me into their lives and adopting me; I become part of them, and they, in an equally subtle way, become part of me. There is very little about us that is really 'us'.

Even our minds—the innermost part of us—are not ours, as we think other people's thoughts, and are swayed, influenced, and controlled by others. You don't believe this? You think your mind is yours, and that you are in control? Well, let's try a little experiment. I will say—or *write*—one word, but before I say it, I want you to get ready—with your finger on the button, so to speak—and try to prevent the image of the thing I mention from coming into your mind. Are you ready? The word—it can be anything at all—is: *banana*. Did you succeed in blocking a picture of a yellow fruit from coming into your mind? Of course you didn't; it is an automatic response, isn't it?

Our identity is intimately bound up with and inseparable from the rest of Existence; it is impossible to conceive of a separate, independent existence. Consequently, we can understand ourselves *only* in context, *only* in relation to other aspects of Life. *Only* by seeing ourselves as part of things might we discover who we are:

***Not Me, not You, but  
WE!***

\* \* \* \* \*

## I, ME, MINE

**B**ECAUSE I SPEAK AND WRITE ABOUT the Buddhist concept of Selflessness or No-Self, someone once asked me if I live according to it.

Before I can answer that, we must briefly discuss what this concept means. You see, at the time of the Buddha, just like today, many people believed that everyone had a separate, personal, immortal and unchanging spirit or soul; Indians called this *Atma* or *Self*. Upon Enlightenment, however, the Buddha saw nothing permanent, separate or immortal that can be grasped and claimed as 'I', 'me' or 'mine'; nothing exists in and by itself, but depends upon many things for its existence. Life, He said, is a process; we are born, remain a while, then pass away, changing all the time. The Buddha was not the only one of His time to see this, however; the Greeks had realized it, too, and the statement of Heraclitus: "You cannot step twice into the same stream", is well-known. Sadly, the development of Western Science from such foundations was halted with the advent of Christianity, and remained dormant for over a thousand years until the time of the Renaissance in Italy, which got much of its inspiration from classical Greece and Rome, rather than from Judaeo-Christianity.

The concept of *Anatma* or *No-Self*, shocks and frightens many of us, seeming to take away every reason for living. "If there is no self, no soul, then who am I, and what is the point of living?" Because of this, Buddhism is often denounced as pessimistic and annihilationist, but really, it is not; it is a way to live, not merely believe; only by experiencing the Teachings of the Buddha shall we know for ourselves their truth and validity. Those who have experienced the truth of No-Self know it is nothing to worry about or fear, but, on the contrary, something to rejoice about, as it means liberation from the narrow prison of 'I'-idea. And even if a person only glimpses it and falls back

from his brief illumination, he ever-afterwards knows what it is all about, although he will not always be able to live according to what he has seen; he has faith—not *belief*, but *faith*, confidence based upon experience and knowledge—that what the Buddha said about there being no Self is true, and this cannot be shaken. Gone, forever, is the belief in a separate, personal, immortal soul. Yet, unless his enlightenment is very deep, he will still act in selfish ways; but this is due to the force of ingrained habit, not from belief in a separate soul. Moreover, since no-one can live another person's life for him, each person has to think for and take care of himself.

**B**ut we do not become enlightened merely by thinking or talking about it, wishing to be, or even by trying to find it, for it is not ours to control. Enlightenment arises when we have prepared ourselves and are ready for it—open, empty, sensitive—when we are not thinking of or expecting it, when the thought of self is not dominating the mind and crowding out everything else. The arising of enlightenment would cause even a blind man to shout joyfully: “Oh yes, I see!”

In order to allay fear of personal annihilation, we may think of the Buddha's immediate disciples: upon enlightenment they didn't lose their identities and become indistinguishable from each other like photo-copies, nor were they known thereafter as A, B, C, or 1, 2, 3. Their identities and individual characteristics remained—Ananda, the Buddha's favorite disciple and personal attendant, was famous for his very-retentive memory, Sariputra for his wisdom, Mogallana for his psychic-powers, and so on. Enlightenment doesn't mean loss of individuality but loss of egoism, selfishness; in fact, it means true individuality, that is: indivisibility, a completely-integrated mind that can no longer be shaken by worldly happenings.

**N**ow, like the gradations on a thermometer, enlightenment comes in many degrees, and probably everyone has had some kind of enlightenment experience at one time or another—some-

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thing that surprised him by its simplicity and clarity—though probably of a mundane type and not spiritual or deeply concerned with the fundamental nature of life. Spiritual enlightenment changes one's life considerably, depending upon the degree or intensity of it; it can be said, with utmost surety, that after a genuine spiritual-enlightenment experience, one's life would not be the same anymore.

**We** all have ego—the sense of 'I', 'me' and 'mine'—and it does not simply disappear by pretending it's not there; in fact, it is strengthened thereby. We cannot overcome ego completely; only Enlightenment can do that. However, even though we may still be far from Enlightenment, there is much that we can do to live in an enlightened way, without pretending, but by being realistic; knowing that ego is at the root of most of our problems with others, we can strive to replace it with Dharma at the center of our relationships with others, no longer thinking in terms of *who* is right and wrong, but endeavoring, always, to perceive *what* is right and wrong, and, as far as we possibly can, standing firm by what is right. What a lovely world it would be if people stopped thinking subjectively in terms of "I am right and you are wrong", and sincerely looked objectively for *what* is right and wrong instead, prepared to sit down and discuss intelligently, instead of being devious and resorting to violence and war to settle differences of opinions. The unwillingness and inability to put ego behind us or to one side in the pursuit of what is right and true is a sign of immaturity and insecurity. Because of this immaturity we find it very hard to admit our mistakes and apologize for them, preferring instead, to cover them up with excuses and further mistakes, and becoming swallowed up by the game of 'The Great Pretence', from which it is so hard to extricate ourselves.

**And** this business about 'face': it is sometimes carried to ridiculous extremes, and causes endless trouble. Face? *What* face? If we really understood what the Buddha taught about



'self', we would not be so concerned about 'face' and pride, and would put them in the trash-can where they belong!

Yes, I also have ego, just like you; how could it be that I should have no ego while this side of enlightenment? Why deny what is? However, I have learned that ego should often be put aside and am prepared to try to do this. Many people, I'm sure, would say I have a big ego and an abrasive personality. And I say: "So what? Why are you so concerned with things like that?" Even though I have a big ego and abrasive personality, I try to see beyond them, and anyone with just a grain of impartiality will quickly recognize that I call nobody to believe and follow me, but to listen—yes, I ask people to *listen*—and to think clearly and to decide for themselves whether what I say is true and useful to them or not. There are no saviors or supermen; the Buddha told, very clearly, that we must each save ourselves, that no-one can save another. I have no disciples, nor do I want any; I advise people not to follow anyone, but to find out what is right and true.

There are, I have heard, several self-styled '*Living-Buddhas*' among the Vietnamese and Chinese—I've even met one of them myself—but I have grave doubts about them. Someone once told me about the particular '*Living-Buddha*' that I met: "Master So-and-so is already successful; he can travel by mind wherever he wants to go!" To this I replied: "Oh really? Then why does he waste so much time and money going by plane and car?" He probably has some psychic-power—as did the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta—but that does not make him enlightened; we shouldn't be so gullible!

There are few really-enlightened people in the world today, it would seem—maybe it's always so—and if we go in search of an enlightened person to save us, we will probably be disappointed. Someone once wrote to me lamenting the fact that her ill-health prevented her from attending Dharma-talks by famous teachers. I tried to explain to her that she

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should not feel so bad about this, because what, after all, did she expect to hear from those teachers that she didn't already know after all her studies? There is nothing secret or esoteric about the Buddha's Teachings; everything is clear and out in the open. The Buddha said: "I have not the 'closed fist' of a teacher, teaching some things but keeping others back, hidden and secret". He also said: "In all these years, just this have I taught: Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering, and the Way to the Cessation of Suffering". Therefore, our Teacher—Suffering—is never far from us; once we have heard or read about the Buddha's Four Noble Truths about Suffering and have understood them—intellectually at least, if not intuitively—we are equipped to follow the Way. What need, therefore, to continue to go through the theory? Undoubtedly, while listening to a Dharma-talk, one might get a flash of insight or enlightenment, especially if one is 'tuned-in' to the Dharma, enjoys listening, and pays attention; but if one understands that the Dharma is all-inclusive and omnipresent, one will know that insight and enlightenment can arise anywhere, anytime, and not just during a Dharma-talk.

\* \* \* \* \*

"A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death."

Albert Einstein: *Religion and Science*,  
New York Times Magazine, 9 November 1930.

\* \* \* \* \*

## FROM BLACK TO WHITE

ALONG THE WAY, LIFE often seems to grow heavier and harder than before we set our feet upon it. But although this is so, it is not the only thing we find; at the same time, we grow correspondingly stronger, and able to carry not only our own load, but to reach out and help others carry theirs, who otherwise might be struggling and staggering along.

Sometimes, too, we might think in despair: "Why did I ever get into this? The Way is so difficult and the Goal so far, and I feel too weak to reach it." But there is no going back; there is, moreover, no staying here, for the present is transitory and cannot be clung to as a support. We must go on, so take heart from all those who trod the Path before us; they had their trials, too, just as will all those who come after us.

We can take only one step at a time, and the next step is always the most important—and often the most difficult—of our life, because it *is* the next step, and each succeeding step will be 'the next step.' We must keep our sight fixed upon it, and not strain our eyes gazing up at the mountain-top, through the mists and clouds that enshroud it, wondering what it is like up there. We shall get there in due course if we pursue the Way, step by step. The desire for quick results often blinds us to the results that appear quite suddenly and quietly, and not infrequently; we look for things, but do not see what is here.

Remember: All things change. Just around the corner may be that element, that factor, that will change, mysteriously, the whole picture; it need not be something big, dramatic or stupendous, but might be something seemingly trivial; it will make all the difference, however, and you will wonder why you had felt depressed before.

If we can open ourselves to the changes of life instead of resisting them, our passage along the ever-flowing river will not

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be so rough. We must accept our vulnerability and stop pretending we are supermen. As human-beings who are—let's face it—not yet enlightened, we are subject to various kinds of mental disorders; but this is not unusual—indeed, it is to be expected. The Buddha said that all unenlightened beings are crazy, in varying degrees—or words to that effect. So we need not feel too bad about it, as we are not alone in this. Neither must we remain like this forever, as we can change, and must allow ourselves the possibility to do so, and not be so hard on ourselves. If we do not, then one day, perhaps, unable to live with ourselves any longer, we might throw ourselves beneath a train or take an overdose of something or other.

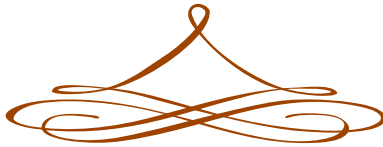
If we become sad, we should recognize that sadness has arisen because of certain causes, and, having arisen, will also pass away, like everything else. If we grasp at the sadness and become sad about being sad, then we will be double-sad, and it will go on and on like that. The same is true if we are angry; we shouldn't be angry about being angry, but should see it as it is, and let it go.

Something else we should not forget is to stand back at times, and look at ourselves from a distance, to see ourselves on the stage of Life. Oftentimes, we take ourselves too seriously, and lose perspective. While it is true that there is a lot of suffering in the world, there are moments of happiness and comedy, too; it is not a complete tragedy. The ability to look on the bright side and laugh at ourselves at times, is a priceless thing, and can sustain us through all kinds of hardships.

Followers of the Way learn, during their journey, to see the white in the black, where before, all seemed black; when they become adept at this, they may change black into white, and the rocks in their path will no longer be seen as obstacles but as stepping-stones. A different way of looking at things can often change our understanding of them considerably. Look at any

## FROM BLACK TO WHITE }

object within reach of you right now—a pen, for example: most of us see a pen as merely an instrument to write with, but to the man who conceived the idea of a pen, and who struggled, by trial-and-error, and probably with much frustration, to create it, it was much more than that; he knew it from every possible angle, and knew it, no doubt, with love, too. There is wonder all around us, at every turn, and everything has its story. The problem is, our eyes are old and tired and we do not see clearly. We say: "My life is so ordinary and boring; nothing interesting ever happens to me." This, of course, is not true; life is never boring but always new and different. If we were to examine ourselves, we would probably find that we are 'disconnected' or out-of-tune with Life; we would then be in a position to tune-in again, and find ourselves once more as parts of Life, instead of apart from it.



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## LEARNING FROM PAIN

IS THERE ANYONE WHO HAS NO REGRETS about the past, about things done that ought not to have been done, things not done that should have been done? We travel through life weighted down by burdens of regret, not knowing how to rid ourselves of them.

It takes intelligence to learn from the mistakes, advice or example of others. But intelligence is not common in a world where ignorance and stupidity are often considered virtues, where competitive-spirit is inculcated in us from infancy, and where the idea that 'Might is Right' still prevails. The rest of us have to struggle on painfully, making many mistakes, and learning from them, if and when we perceive them as mistakes.

Among the things I regret doing are hunting animals and birds and catching fish when I was young; I now realize I caused a lot of unnecessary pain, as I did it only for 'fun' and not because I was hungry and needed those creatures for food. If my parents told me not to do it, their advice made so little impression on me that I do not remember it at all, and so I continued to do what I now cannot undo, but which I will try to atone for, in some measure. I don't blame my parents—in fact, I must praise them for helping me in countless ways—but I think that if they had advised me in a different way instead of just telling me not to do such things because they were 'bad,' I might have understood and desisted. Advice must include a reference-point: oneself, for this is where we must begin our journey or undertaking: with oneself. If, therefore, my parents had explained to me that the animals, birds and fish that I was callously depriving of life, were just like me in their desire to live and be happy, to avoid pain and death, I would have had a reference-point, I would have been included in the picture, alongside the animals and fish. The whole matter would have appeared quite differently, I'm sure.

## LEARNING FROM ~~FRAGE~~ }

**B**ut it was years before I began to realize and see things in this light for myself, and stopped killing. And now I'm in a position to explain about this to others. We do not need to kill, but can live easily without killing. If we kill, not only do we deprive other beings of their most treasured and irreplaceable possession, but we injure ourselves, because, as Lao Tsu said: "If you delight in killing, you cannot fulfill yourself."

**W**hen we live as members of a community, we have responsibilities towards that community; if we do not want the responsibilities, we should be honest, and give up the benefits of community life, too. But then where would we be? We would not be very happy at all, to say the least. Nothing is free; we are only deluding ourselves if we think we can get something for nothing. See how things are advertised: "Free gift with \$20 dollars-worth of gas," for example. Free? If it were really free, we could go to the gas-station and ask for the free gift without buying anything, and technically, would be within our rights. But just try it, and see what happens! According to the law, they are advertising under false-pretenses, but this is so widespread that it's not noticed, and most people don't understand what is going on, because, like moths to a candle-flame, they are fascinated and fooled by the magic word 'FREE'!

**N**othing is free. We pay for everything, sometime or other, though not always with money; there are other forms of payment, like labor and services; but by far the most-common forms of payment are disappointment, suffering and pain.

**T**here are now about 6 billion people in the world, and each of us has his or her own personal little world that no-one else can inhabit or fully understand; I have my world, and you have yours, within the big world we call 'ours.' All these tiny personal worlds are not completely separated from each other like air-tight capsules, however, but touch and overlap each other in many ways. Via these words, for example, my world is now touching yours. We do not live alone; we *cannot*, even if we

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want to; it's impossible! We live together with others—humans and non-humans—each with hopes, fears and desires quite similar to our own. No-one wants to be unhappy, to suffer or die, do they? Everyone wants to be happy and loved, just like you and I. You have your reference-point, and I have mine: ourselves. Starting with and understanding ourselves, we shall begin to look at others with understanding, and respect them as people with feelings and rights, just like ourselves. The journey begins here.

There's a proverb: "People who live in glass-houses should not throw stones." We complain loudly when someone wrongs us, but expect others to keep quiet when we wrong them. Isn't it strange? Surely, we are entitled to complain about things only when we are not guilty of the things we complain about ourselves. Many Vietnamese blame the Communists in Vietnam for all their misfortunes, for example, but this is not fair, for while the V.C. might be held responsible for *some* of their misfortunes, they should not be blamed for *all*; even without Communists, or other people of that kind who cause trouble to others, we would still suffer in various ways.

Some years ago, in one of the Refugee Camps of S.E. Asia, where I spent some time, I was talking with a young man about this, and noticed he had a number of scars on his body, so, pointing to one on his arm, I asked: "Did the Communists do that to you?" "No," he said, "I cut myself with a knife." "Then how about that one?" I said, indicating one on his knee, "Did they do that to you?" "No, I fell on a rock and cut it." "Well, what about that one on your head?" "Oh, someone hit me with a piece of wood." "Then", I said, "you cannot blame the Communists for everything that happened to you, can you?"

Saying this, I know, will not help the expatriate Vietnamese recover their lost homeland, and I am not offering any theories or plans on how to do that, nor should anyone expect anything like that from me, as I am not a military strategist, politician,



## LEARNING FROM PAIN }

diplomat or statesman. What I am talking about is how to turn pain into gain, failure into success, defeat into victory, weakness into strength; listen:

The pain that the Vietnamese suffered at the hands of the Communists in Vietnam should be fully understood, so that they will not make the same mistakes themselves, and will be opposed to all their kinds of nonsense forever. They say they hate the deceit, dishonesty, cruelty, false promises and corruption of the Communists. Good! *Very good!* They should remember, therefore, and have nothing to do with these things themselves, lest they become worse than the V.C. Only then might they have grounds for blaming the Communists.

People complain that it's so difficult to 'follow the Way' in the present time and conditions, but it's not true. We have reached a level of material prosperity that we've never known throughout history before, and have no need to fear starvation here—in countries like Australia, England, and the U.S., at least. If we really want to 'follow the Way' it's easier than ever before, for never have we had as many teachers as now to help us to understand. A class in school consists of from 15-30 students, with just one teacher; rarely, if ever, is there a ratio of 1:1. But, in following the Way, each of us has countless teachers, and yet we complain that it's very hard! We see things all around us that we hate, dislike, disagree with and fear; we are aware of all the greed, corruption, exploitation, injustice, selfishness and stupidity, and know that these things are wrong. *All* these things are our teachers; they help us to understand, and show us the way *not* to go, the things *not* to do. If we have never encountered corruption or injustice, we may be excused for not knowing them to be wrong, but when we are familiar with them, how can we plead ignorance? If we hate something, that's all the more reason to avoid doing it ourselves; if we commit the same kind of things that we hate in others, are we not even worse than they, having learned nothing from them?

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No, it's not hard to 'follow the Way'—it's easy! What is difficult is being oneself, separating oneself from the blind masses who wander around aimlessly, and doing what one knows to be right! We have lost our inner strength, our character, our self-reliance, and have joined the herd in complaining and blaming others for whatever happens to us, instead of accepting responsibility for our own lives.

There are two kinds of suffering: Natural and Man-made. Because we have been born, we suffer; this is why Lao Tsu said: **"Accept misfortune as the bodily condition. Why do I say 'Accept misfortune as the bodily condition'? Because without a body, how could there be misfortune?"** While some of our natural suffering—that involved in growing, aging and death—cannot be avoided, much of it can be. But it is the man-made suffering that is really avoidable and therefore unnecessary. Is war really necessary? Cannot we find better ways to express ourselves, release our energies, display our talents, science and technology than through crime, and causing suffering to others? Would we like it if someone mugged, robbed, exploited or cheated us or our children? The advice of Confucius: "Do not do to others what you would not like others to do to you," is still good, after all these centuries.



## WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

IF WE ARE GIVEN AN ANSWER TO A PROBLEM—let us say, for example, 7,253—without first knowing the question, would there be any way of discovering, with certainty, the question which led to that answer? Was it the square-root of another figure? Or the sum of two or more figures added together, the result of a multiplication, subtraction, division? With just the answer to go by, it would be impossible to work back to the question, would it not?

But this is largely how many of us live our lives: by answers supplied to us by others, while the questions remain hidden or obscure. Surely, something is wrong in this and needs some investigation. And today, we are fortunate, because we have the time and freedom to carry out such an investigation; should we not make use of it?

Life is often puzzling and there are many things we do not understand. Moreover, we have made life excessively complicated by our ideas and beliefs, which make it harder to understand, as we filter and measure our experiences by our concepts, instead of the other way around. Often, we begin with a concept about something and twist and distort facts in an attempt to make them correspond with the concept, instead of making the concept fit the facts. Many of us are persuaded, by Belief, that we know all there is to know about Truth, God, Life, etc., and the process of discovery is severely hampered, if not altogether smothered thereby.

Before we can understand, we must know that we don't know, and must be honest about it, and not pretend we know, for that way, we come to a full-stop. Why be ashamed to admit that we don't know something? No-one knows everything. And, if seen for what it is, Ignorance also has a part to play: we move from Ignorance to Knowledge. Recognition of Ignorance

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as Ignorance is already Knowledge, while perceiving Ignorance as Knowledge is Ignorance indeed!

Religion is also a thing that most people inherit from others, and few make more than a cursory examination of it. This is a pity, because religion, if improperly understood, becomes a means of bondage and impedes spiritual growth, instead of fulfilling its real purpose, which is to provide a way of facing life bravely, helping us become mature and psychologically-free, so that we can live with a sense of balance. But many of us seem unwilling to take the time and trouble to understand the purpose of religion, and find it easier to simply believe and follow just what others tell us. Consequently, organized religion becomes silly, scorned and jeered at by rational and scientific-minded people—and not without reason, either. On one hand, we are able to perform such wonderful feats as putting men on the moon or sending them to the bottom of the sea, but on the other hand, we are still living in mental caves with our religious dogmas. Surely, if we are to live in a sane and balanced way, we must either reject, outright, our advanced technology and return to medieval-style living, or review our inner-life, our convictions and beliefs, and bring them up-to-date; we cannot continue living in such a schizophrenic way as we are doing.

Religions, basically, are hypotheses—that is, frameworks or guidelines to enable us to cope with life in this bewildering world of change, and rise above it. We must realize that life has become increasingly complex since the major religions began thousands of years ago, until now, we find ourselves almost governed by machines, the implications of which are frightening. Can we reconcile the teachings of the old books with our times? Can the two go together? Surely, we must think about this intelligently, those of us to whom religion still retains any meaning. Can religion be reconciled with science and technology or must we live divided lives, torn between the ancient and the modern, the inner and the outer, the scientific

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and the religious, the intellect and the emotions? Or can we make of religion a science, as science has become a religion to many? Must we always depend upon others for our convictions? Why must we believe anything at all? Wishing to discover something not yet known, a scientist investigates things with an open mind; probably he has some idea—a hypothesis—of what he is looking for, but he is always willing to change his ideas as his knowledge expands and proves his ideas inadequate and no longer supported by facts.

It is vital to know the question, for without it, the answer can never be found. And the question must be your own question, from your heart, your center, not that of anyone else. You must know what you want from life, and also what you want to give to life, and not be content merely to follow others. Religion must help us lead meaningful lives of growth, learning and discovery; if it does not, but merely provides us with ready-made answers, which it expects us to swallow unthinkingly and without question, it is a failure, and should be consigned to the garbage-truck as quickly as possible.

Those who accept and follow religion blindly without understanding its purpose, are not assets to the religion at all, as some people think in their mad haste to gain converts to their own particular and narrow ways of looking at life. Thoughtless and unquestioning people are so much 'dead wood', and only weigh down the boat of religion, until, by sheer weight of numbers, it sinks. Religion should inspire us to think, to learn, to face life intelligently and fearlessly, so that we may discover the solutions to our social and personal problems. As it is, when the leaders of religion propose and cling to untenable standpoints, what can be expected of the followers?

We cannot live our lives by books. When we go shopping, we do not stop and think: "Now, what does the Bible say about this product?" "Does the Dhammapada endorse this?" We have to use our own knowledge to choose, limited though that

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knowledge might be. If we choose a product of inferior quality, perhaps next time we will make a better choice, having learned something from the experience. We cannot expect to learn without sometimes making mistakes; there's a price for everything, and if we learn something from our mistakes, they will not have been in vain. Life is a series of experiences, and there is always room to learn.

**M**ost religions encourage belief and discourage doubt, as doubt is an enemy of authority. But doubt is actually better than belief, for it keeps us alert, moving and learning. He whose mind is full of belief, on the other hand, has already 'arrived,' he thinks he knows—just as Europeans of the Middle Ages believed the Earth was flat (as the Church taught), until Magellan began to doubt this and proved otherwise—and so does not bother to go any further, even when mountains of facts contrary to his beliefs stare him in the face.

If religion is founded upon facts, upon truth, we need not fear adapting to changing times. But if religion cannot stand up to changing times, to questions people are likely to ask and require reasonable answers to—answers supported by evidence and not just by ancient stories—then perhaps it is time to question one's beliefs.

If there *is* Truth, it must be something that doesn't change—like water: it was wet in the past, it is wet now, and it will be wet in the future; it is wet here, there, and everywhere, and there can be no disagreement about this, no matter what one's race, religion, nationality or politics, because wetness is the main characteristic of water. Truth, similarly, must be something that is so in all times and places, and must apply to all people and things, so that it can be seen, demonstrated and accepted by all without disagreement. Different religions have different teachings and beliefs and often, the differences divide people, so that there is disagreement about what they claim to be true. Where there is disagreement, where there is no de-

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monstrable evidence that can be accepted by all, can there be Truth? Truth should be self-evident; it's no use telling people today that they must believe, for people today—quite rightly—want proof in this very important matter. It is better to put forward a little of what is true and which can be verified, than to put forward much of what cannot be experienced.

There are Three Facts of Life which can be seen here and now, which are self-evident, and which, if understood, provide a solid foundation for intelligent religious living. The first is the Fact of Change or Impermanence. We do not have to believe this, for it is going on ceaselessly, within and without us, whether we believe it or not, like it or not, and there is nothing we can do to stop it. It can be demonstrated that everything material is composed of atoms, and that an atom is not a solid substance in itself, but a process, a pattern of energy. Everything changes into something else: the sand on the beach possibly once composed high mountains; the atoms that make up our bodies certainly congregated here from many sources, and will be scattered far and wide when we die and our bodies decompose. The Sun, on which all living things depend, will also sometime either explode or remain as a burnt-out celestial cinder for a while, until it too breaks down and re-forms into other things. Nothing remains the same from one moment to the next, though our limited senses generally do not enable us to see this; nevertheless, the ceaseless process goes on.

The Second Fact, though, is easily seen as it is unpleasant, whereas the Fact of Change is not always so. It is the Fact of Suffering: all living things feel pain and suffer. With a physical body, there will be physical pain; this too, is self-evident. But it is not only the body that suffers; the mind also suffers, through things like grief, worry, fear, anger, jealousy, greed, ambition, hate, stupidity, etc., though these are forms of suffering it is possible to do something about, *more so*, in fact, than about the sufferings of the body and its eventually dissolution. It is hard

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to keep the body healthy if the mind is sick, and even if the mind is not sick, it is impossible to prevent the body from dying. However, by understanding the workings of the mind, and seeing, directly, what is true, it is possible for the mind to rise above suffering. Mental suffering is caused by not understanding the real nature of life, of our identity and our relationship to all other forms of life; when we live according to misunderstanding, things go wrong, and the result is pain, what else?

The Third Fact concerns our identity: Nothing exists in and by itself; nothing is independent; everything—including 'you' and 'I'—depends upon many things for its existence, moment-by-moment. There is no separate, immortal, unchanging 'soul' or 'I,' but just a process like a stream or river. Surely, we know the River Nile is not the River Mekong or the Amazon, etc; they are different because of many factors. But, in a more-real sense, there *is* no River Nile, Mekong, Amazon, etc.; in fact, there is no river at all, for what we call a 'river' is just a movement, a process of change. We might say it is the movement of a body of water, but then we must ask: "What is water?" and might give it its chemical term, H<sub>2</sub>O, but still we do not have a river, or now, even any water! And we can analyze and reduce ourselves in a similar way, until we find nothing that we can call our own. We exist only in relationship to and dependent upon other processes.

Certainly, physical appearances don't immediately change if we look at things in this way; the water of the river still runs downwards to the sea, left foot follows right foot follows left foot, we continue to eat and speak, and so on. But a change takes place in the mind of one who understands; his attitude towards life-in-general is not what it was before. And this is where his religion begins: he sees himself as a part *of* life, not apart *from* it. He knows that he does not live—*cannot* live—for himself alone, so he tries to live, consciously, for the life-of-which-he-is-a-part. And though he might appear to be only a



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tiny part, yet he is important and has his place; he is no longer lost and adrift in his mind. He lives responsibly and with love, viewing all other fragments of life as his family, for he is not separated from them, but connected to them in various ways.

In modern terminology this is known as *ECOLOGY*, which means how living things are seen as connected to other living things like the knots of a fishing-net are connected to each other. The Earth is a vast *ECO-SYSTEM*, of which we have only just recently become aware, a delicate network of life-forms dependent and interdependent upon one another. This eco-system is now gravely endangered because of the activities of *MAN*, the one species that has the ability to reason and choose; Man alone, of all the other life-forms with which he shares this Planet, is able to recall the past and look with imagination to the future; he, alone, is capable of understanding the interconnectedness of things; but instead of living in a way that does not seriously affect the balance that had been maintained from time immemorial, his carelessness, greed and stupidity have brought it to the brink of disaster. And, now that we have become aware of the results of our activities it is a race-against-time to take measures to slow down the process of destruction, hopefully, to the point where Nature might recover from the wounds we have inflicted upon her.

The onus is on human-beings to save the Planet; we can no longer shirk our responsibility. But it needs a drastic change of consciousness, not a mere passing concern about what is happening. It means we must see things clearly, according to reality—which is, that the Planet Earth does not belong to us and is not our personal property, to exploit and do with as we like. By virtue of our understanding, we are its custodians, and must strive to preserve it and pass it on to posterity.

Different religions have presumed to tell us the Purpose of Life, but their 'explanations' differ from each other, and sometimes conflict. The purpose of life, surely, is not something that

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someone can reveal to another, but must be something that each and everyone should discover and determine for himself. For one person, the purpose of life might be to become rich, for another, to become famous, for another, to become learned, etc.; but these are subjective and personal purposes, not *the* Purpose of Life. Can anyone really tell us what is The *Grand* Purpose of Life—presuming that there is one? It is useless to say that the Purpose of Life is to find God, or Truth, or go to Heaven when we die, to attain Nirvana, etc., as that is just speculation based upon belief, and there is no proof; also, such explanations only make people dull and lazy, instead of inspiring them to investigate and discover for themselves.

Perhaps—and this is just a thought and not a statement—perhaps the Purpose of Life is simply to *Live*. But *how* to live?

***THAT IS THE QUESTION!***



## WORK NOT JUST FOR MONEY

THERE IS AN OLD PROVERB that is often misquoted as: "Money is the root of all evil". It should be "Love of money is the root of all evil". It is how we use it that makes it appear good or bad. A knife on the table can do nothing, but immediately it is picked up it can be used for any amount of purposes, depending upon the intention of the user; it can be used to cut string, prepare food, or stab someone with. It is not the knife that does these things but the person using it. And it is the same with money.

Nobody will deny the importance of money unless he is hopelessly impractical. Long gone are the days of bartering goods and services for other goods and services. Certainly, money is important and we wouldn't get very far without it. But there are limits to its use, like with most things; we should recognize what it can be used for and what is beyond it; we should understand its place and always be its master instead of allowing it to become our master, as so often happens. Many of us use money to measure everything, thinking that everything must have a price, and if it hasn't, it must be worthless. "How much is it?" "How much did it cost?" we ask. We cannot conceive of anything being without or beyond price.

Most people, if asked their religion, would probably say something like, "Catholic," "Lutheran," "Buddhist," "Muslim," etc.; few people would say they have no religion; fewer still would tell you their religion is Money. But actually, the most powerful and widespread religion in the world, the one with the most followers, *is* Money, and always has been; it is the God of a large proportion of mankind, no matter what they call themselves. Many people live for money, caught up in the crazy way of life we have created; and some people will do anything for it, including killing others. They equate money with happiness, but there are people with lots of money who are still not

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happy. Surely, it would be very difficult to be happy if one were so poor that he couldn't feed his family or pay the rent. But happiness cannot be bought. It is a state of mind that must arise, unsought, as a result of the way we live; efforts to find happiness are self-doomed to failure.

There are many ways to be rich and many ways to be poor. Some people are rich in terms of money but poor in spirit, in friendship, in health or in happiness; others might be rich in health or friends but poor in other ways. A follower of the Way should not think he is poor, even if his pockets are empty; he should always think he is rich, because following the Way and getting the fruits thereof is the greatest wealth. If he thinks he is poor, he will be poor.

Consider the cases of Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and the Shah of Iran: they were among the wealthiest men in the world, in terms of money they had obtained by wrongful means. But, toppled by revolution, they became hunted fugitives. All their wealth could not buy them safety or peace of mind; their enemies followed them like bloodhounds, and drove them into their graves soon after.

Then there is the case of an Indian Prince, who had everything money could buy at that time; he had only to beckon or clap his hands and servants would run to carry out his wishes. But he felt that there was more to life than the pleasures of the palace; he was disturbed by an urge to find out what life was all about. So, at the age of 29, at the height of his vigor, he crept stealthily out of the palace and became a religious mendicant in search of truth. Finally, after six long years of deprivation and struggle, he found what he was looking for, and from the time he left the palace until he passed away at the age of 80, he never had any money, but just his robes, an alms-bowl, and a few other necessities. But he was the richest man in the world because he was enlightened; he was a *Buddha*.

## **WORK NOT JUST FOR MONEY }**

Out of necessity, we must earn a living in some way. Many people earn their living in ways that are harmful to others, and therefore, eventually harmful to themselves. That is why the Buddha advised people about right and wrong ways of livelihood, to avoid work that involves killing, hurting or trading in living beings, trade in weapons, harmful drugs, alcohol and other substances like poisons, and not to be involved in gambling, cheating, lying or swindling. Ideally, a follower of the Way should engage in work that is helpful to others in some way, but at least, not harmful. This limits him somewhat, to be sure, but it is for his own benefit.

Somehow, no matter what kind of work a person does—as long as it is not harmful—he should be able to see it as being of some use or service to others. If he works only for money, he will find no lasting satisfaction in it, even if he gets a very high salary, for money alone cannot provide satisfaction. Work should be seen as a spiritual exercise too, so that both the outer and the inner life are fulfilled. If a person tires himself out physically, without any spiritual satisfaction, his work will bring him to an early end; in all probability, he will hate his work—as many people do—if he sees it only as a means of making money, and no amount of money will make him see it otherwise. That is why there are always strikes for more and more money; there is no end to it, like drinking sea-water to quench one's thirst. But if he saw it as a way of contributing something positive to the community, and as a way of serving others, he would find fulfillment and spiritual satisfaction; it doesn't cost anything to look at work this way, and it would be like getting a double salary! On top of this, he would have more interest and energy in life. Try it with your own work, and see for yourself.

There is another old saying: "If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well". This is very true, like most old proverbs. But what has happened in our highly-mechanized world is that people find little meaning in their work and feel that they have

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not much relationship to the finished, mass-produced articles that they have helped to churn out; consequently, there is little interest in and even less enjoyment of their work. We live in a robotic age, when people are becoming like machines, working in mindless ways. Surely, it is difficult to find satisfaction therein, but that is all the more reason why we need to find it, to look deeper and deeper until we can discern in what ways our labor is useful to others, and how it is making the world a little bit better. And if it cannot be found after a deep inspection, it would be better to look for another job, as such unspiritual work is deadly to one's inner life.



## LOOK BOTH WAYS

**WHEN WE THINK OF IT**, it is easy to see how we are influenced, conditioned and taught to be greedy and covetous, to always try to satisfy our desires; we live in a world gone mad with greed. We are pressured in school to get good grades and 'succeed' so we may get well-paid jobs and respect in society. TV bombards us subtly, blatantly and incessantly with countless appealing images, wheedling, inviting and persuading us to *acquire* and *own*, and if we don't have the cash or don't want to pay then, we can 'charge it' and pay later.

It is nice to have the latest fashions and models in clothes, cars, appliances, etc., and lots of them, too, but at the same time, what happens? By continuously giving way to our desires and indulging ourselves in whatever we want—but often don't need—we weaken our will-power, become discontented, and easily fall into the negative habit of complaining and feeling sorry for ourselves. Surrounded by things that even 20 years ago we might not have dreamed of, are we happy? When we buy something new we are happy with it for a while, but when its novelty has worn off or we see something better, our happiness fades, too, and it becomes just another possession.

Don't get me wrong, however; I'm not suggesting we should eschew modern things, but that we should understand what happens to our minds in regards to them, so that we remain in control, and avoid becoming possessed by our possessions. We would be silly to wash clothes by hand if we have a washing-machine, for example; there is no need to do things the hard way when we have the means to do them easier and better. To refuse to travel by motorized transport because it's 'unnatural' would be rather extreme and neurotic, would it not? The problem is that we soon grow used to things and take them for granted; then, when they break down or are lost or stolen, we feel helpless and don't know what to do.

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The old analogy of a bottle with 50% of its contents is still useful; would we say it is half-full or half-empty? We could say either or both, could we not? But what we said would reveal something about us; an optimistic would say it is half-full, while a pessimist would say it is half-empty. The situation—here, a bottle with 50% of its contents—is the same, but the ways of looking at it are different. There are always at least two ways of looking at everything.

Some years ago, while traveling with a friend on a highway in Malaysia, we were passed by a motor-cyclist doing probably close to 100 mph. As if prophetically, I said: "We'll see him later." Sure enough, about 15 miles down the road, there was his bike in the middle of the highway while he was sprawled on the grass verge, as if dead. We stopped to render assistance and found that he wasn't badly hurt, so while some villagers undertook to look after his bike, we lifted him into the back of our car and drove him to the nearest hospital. He had been eager to return to his home in a distant town to celebrate the Muslim New Year the next day, and so was sad that he would not make it in time; he probably felt he was unfortunate, so I tried to console him but telling him he was lucky, as he could easily have died. As he couldn't undo what had happened, this would have been the best way of looking at it.

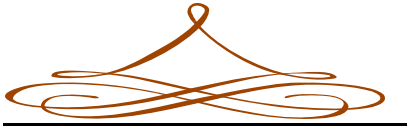
**Some** people regard philosophy as being somewhat out-of-fashion today, which is a pity, as we all need the support of it at times, and the nearer the philosophy is to reality, the more efficacious it is.

**We** often compare ourselves with others, and measure our 'success' besides theirs. But in our comparisons, we usually look at those who have more, and not less, than us, so consequently, we become envious and dissatisfied, and feel sorry for ourselves. If we looked at those with less than us, however, our situation would appear quite different; it all depends upon how we look at it. Always there will be people better-off or



## **LOOK BOTH WAYS }**

worse-off than us, richer or poorer than we are; we are always somewhere in between, and no-one is 'top' in every way. If we must compare ourselves with others, let us look in both directions, like before crossing a busy street.



## WHICH ROMANS?

A PROVERB OFTEN USED TO encourage integration and conformity is: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," but, like most proverbs, it should not be used in a blanket-way, to fit every situation. Many proverbs are gems of wisdom that have come down to us through the ages, distilled from experience, and are often still useful today, as they express things pithily and succinctly. But they have limits, which we should understand. One proverb says: "Too many cooks spoil the broth," while another says, "Many hands make light work." How to know where to draw the line between 'many' and 'too many'?

Another well-known proverb is, "The love of money is the root of all evil." This is a categorical *allness* statement, and is just not true. *All* evil? Surely, there are other causes of evil than just the 'love of money,' because evil existed in societies that didn't use money, and the hit-movie, *THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY*, shows how selfishness and possessiveness can arise over such a thing as an empty bottle that fell from a plane among the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, who knew nothing of money. This led to such disruption of long-established tribal-life that they soon concluded that 'the gods must be crazy' to send them such a gift!

**W**e should know the limits of things. A hammer is useful for driving in nails, but not for sewing cloth or writing a letter; a saw is good for cutting wood, but can't be used for drilling holes or shaving one's face; a plastic bucket is ideal for carrying water, but try cooking in it and see what will happen!

**M**onkeys have been known to imitate people and strike matches, sometimes with disastrous results, as they don't know how to control fire. Much of *our* behavior, too, is learned through imitating, and young people, especially, succumbing to 'peer-group pressure,' are often influenced into doing things

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they perhaps would not do if left to themselves; they feel they must 'belong' to the same age-group they mix with—usually in school—and do whatever is done by that group. This is largely the reason why so many young people go astray and get involved in such activities as drug-abuse, violence, vandalism and other crimes; because it's deemed the 'in-thing' to do, they disregard their own better-judgment and 'join the crowd.' I know all about that; I was young myself once, and am not so old now that I can't recall—often with shame—my own youth and the things I did then, some harmless, some *harmful*, many stupid, during those 'mindless years.'

Maybe it's necessary for young people to rebel against their elders during the difficult transition from adolescence to adulthood, in order to strike out on their own into the big wide world, to break some of the psychological ties that bind them to their parents, but it's a pity that much pain is involved in the process, pain felt by the adolescent, and pain that he/she often causes to others. My youth has gone forever; I'll never be young again—not in this life, at least. But supposing I could turn back the clock and become 18 or 20 again, just as I was at that age: do you think I would? Not at all! I was much more stupid than I am now, and I do not relish the idea of doing again what I did then. So I guess I'll just have to be content with what I am, and try to go uphill for the rest of my life instead of down—mentally, that is, because physically, it's out of the question.

Only a few years ago I heard the saying: "Youth is wasted on the young"; had I heard it while young, I might not have understood it as I do now. Many of us waste our youth when we are young, thinking it will last forever, but it's gone before we know it. However, there are various ways of being young and old, and not just in terms of bodily age. I recall reading somewhere how "many people die when they're around 20, but don't get buried until they're 60 or 70." Eh? Yes, they 'die,' mentally, when they are young, although they continue to live

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physically; they lose interest in life, and the burning urge to discover and find out is often smothered and stifled by others, instead of encouraged. Small kids ask lots of questions, but their parents do not always respond positively, and sometimes say: "Oh, don't bother me now; I'm tired," or, if they are unable to answer the question satisfactorily, due to ignorance or embarrassment, they make excuses, and the spirit of inquiry in the child is quenched; slowly, he learns not to ask questions.

The education-system is also very much to blame for killing people's minds; under the terrible pressure to 'succeed' and out-do one's fellows, young people in schools and universities are taught what is deemed necessary for them to know, but not really assisted to learn and find out for themselves. Educational-institutions churn out 'paper-people,' armed with degrees and diplomas, without which they are hardly recognized as respectable human beings; it is something so false, because such places give only a partial education, concentrating upon 'head-knowledge.' Thus, people become more ruthless and uncaring about others as a result of their education. One notable example that comes to mind is Henry Kissinger, the former U.S. Secretary of State who, when in office, conspired with the then-President, Richard Nixon, to bomb the *Ho Chi Minh Trail* inside Cambodia—without the knowledge or consent of Congress. The unlooked-for result of this was that many Cambodians were easily recruited by Pol Pot for his eventual take-over of Cambodia in April 1975. It was only later, when the 'Water-gate Scandal' hit, that the Nixon/Kissinger conspiracy was revealed, and Nixon was forced to resign in shame, but Kissinger was untouched, and until now, still travels around giving lectures for huge fees. *He* is what is considered to be highly-educated, but he is by no means an honest person. This illustrates the difference between being taught and learning.

Years ago, in Indonesia, I met a monk who had been a Muslim until he was 80, when he became a Buddhist. At the

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age of 101 he became a monk, and that's when he stopped riding a bicycle. When I met him he was 105, and he told me that he wanted to learn English! With a mind like that, I don't think he could be called old; his body was old, of course—*very* old—but his mind—and *that* is the most-important part of a person, not his body—was young! He died when I was 112.

You know, the word 'man' comes from the Sanskrit word 'manas' meaning 'mind'; so man is really mind, much more than body. Let me explain this more: We have various physical senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. When we experience something through these senses, the sensation is transmitted to the brain via the nerves. So quickly does this happen that we are not aware of it happening, and in the brain it is translated and interpreted, and becomes there a mental or psychic experience. We act, thereafter, on the basis of how the brain has translated and interpreted the sensation. If you pick up a hot object, for example, you feel the heat on your skin, and the nerves there flash the sensation to your brain, which translates it according to past experience, and interprets it as a dangerous situation. Instructions are then issued for you to quickly put down the hot object. This all happens very fast, of course, seemingly automatically and without thought, but not so; thought is behind it all, faster than the speed of light!

**We** cannot prevent our bodies getting older, but the mind is different, being non-physical, and is not, therefore, subject to physical laws. We must differentiate between the physical organ of the brain and the Mind. Long ago, people of both East and West considered the heart to be the seat of consciousness, *not* the brain, but medical-science, within the last 30 years or so, has disproved this. People who have had heart-transplants have awoken from the operation still thinking with their own minds, not with the minds of those whose hearts now beat in their breasts. So now, it is generally conceded that the brain must be the base of the mind; there have been no brain-

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transplants yet to disprove this, so we go on the supposition that it is so. But the brain is not the mind, for the mind—the consciousness—can exist apart from the brain, as attested by many people who have been declared clinically-dead, and after reviving, have described their 'out-of-the-body' experiences. Also, many people have been regressed, through hypnosis, to their youth, infancy, intra-uterine state, and back, beyond the moment of conception—which some have told of as like being sucked up into a vacuum-cleaner—to their previous life, although this is not recognized as constituting proof of rebirth in scientific circles. However, these and other accounts strongly suggest that the mind can and does exist independently from the brain and the rest of the physical body, and is not subject to the normal aging process. Therefore, we should not allow our mind to become old, together with the body, as many of us do, but should hone it as we would a knife, so that it becomes and stays alert and sharp. The body will become old, if it does not die earlier, but the mind might remain young and fresh. How sad it is to come across people—*especially* young people—who obviously consider that their education ended when they left school, thinking that being taught is synonymous with learning; they cannot really be said to live but merely to exist.

The capacity of the mind to learn seems to be infinite, but then, so are the things that could be learned—so much so, in fact, that someone has said that "nobody can know everything about anything". The more we were to investigate a thing—literally, *anything*—the more we would find involved in it; it is like the ripple-effect of a stone thrown into a pond, only *this* pond is without limits, and the ripples would go on forever.

Should we just go through life chasing ephemeral forms of happiness? Or should we spend time trying to understand something of our human condition? Apart from our individual karma—that is, the effects of the actions that we, ourselves,

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have done—we are also subject to 'group-karma'—the effects of the actions of the group or groups that we belong to, like families, clubs, associations, nations, races, and so on; we might not have done anything directly, ourselves, but we are still involved in, connected to, and responsible for the actions of the groups we belong to. For example, a friend of mine once had to pay \$500 compensation for the damage caused by his children throwing stones at passing cars; he didn't throw the stones himself, but he was still held accountable for the actions of his children and had to pay for the damage. If war breaks out between two countries, each country treats the citizens of the other country as enemies, even though, as individuals, those people might never had done anything against that country, nor intended to. Conversely, we also benefit from belonging to groups. In countries with welfare-systems, for example, citizens or residents are entitled to many benefits under those systems. There are responsibilities and liabilities from belonging to a group, just as there are benefits. Yin goes with Yang and Yang goes with Yin, inseparably.

There are certain groups that we have little or no choice about being part of, such as family, or race. Nationality, of course, we can change, just like religion, so there we do have some choice. We also have choice in the kind of friends we have, and the activities we indulge in; nobody forces us to do stupid things; we do them of our own accord. However, we are often pressured and influenced into doing things that something inside us—the small, quiet voice of our conscience or better-judgment—tells us not to do. It is difficult to be different, let's face it; few people like to be 'the odd-one-out,' most of us like to 'belong' and be accepted by others, but this, like most things in life, has a price. What price are we prepared to pay to 'belong'? Sometimes, it is at the cost of our individuality, and really, that is too much to pay. We should be encouraged, by our parents, our teachers, and by anyone who really cares

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about us, to keep our integrity at any cost, and not to sacrifice it, lose it, or throw it away, just so that we may belong, temporarily, to a group that, as often as not, has no lasting or worthy purpose, and which we might regret joining later on.

Fashion is another tyrant that we suffer under and which robs us of our individuality. People pay exorbitant sums for the latest fashions in clothes, but a few months later, when they are superseded and outmoded, they would be embarrassed to wear them. Some fashions are bizarre, to say the least, and the top fashion-designers must laugh all the way to the bank from becoming rich out of making people look ridiculous!

Here are five characters: 0 0 0 0 0 Now, what do you think: are they the same or different? Perhaps they appear the same to your eyes, but they are not, for under a microscope, their structure would appear different; and even if it didn't, they would still not be the same, for they occupy different positions in space. And if each one had eyes and could see, what they saw would be different, too, if only slightly, for they would see it from a different viewpoint. Each one is unique, and so are we. Do you know this? You are a unique and special person because you are different; there has never been another person exactly like you before—*anywhere*—and there is not another person exactly like you now—even though there are about 6 billion other people sharing this planet with you; and there will never be another person like you again—or like me. Moreover, since everything changes constantly, we are not the same from moment-to-moment, but are new and different! We are all unique, not photo-copies of some proto-type person—Adam, Eve, Tom, Dick or Harry. And we must know this; even if no-one else recognizes or knows that we are special and unique, we must know it. But, a word of warning, before you begin strutting around with your nose in the air; knowing that you are special does *not* mean that you are better or worse than anyone else, but *different*. It also means that you would recognize



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everyone else as special, too, and not just yourself. So there are conditions, you see.

Now, if someone advises you to conform and "Do as the Romans do, you might ask: "*Which* Romans?" since Romans, like everyone else, are different, too; they were not all cast in a jelly-mold, were they? Moreover, many 'Romans' are stupid, and don't know what they are doing, so if you were to do as such 'Romans', you would also be stupid. There is another proverb to balance the one about Rome and the Romans: "If the blind follows the blind, both will fall into the ditch."

Conformity is a deadening thing; we should be encouraged to find out who we are and become individuals instead of photo-copies. Take care, however, in your non-conformity, lest you conform to something more stupid than that against which you rebel.



## MUST WE SPELL EVERYTHING?

ONCE, AFTER GIVING several Dharma-talks somewhere in Malacca, I was asked for a further talk, and requested to speak on the subject of Compassion, as—so the person said—the people who would be there had attended the previous talks and wanted to hear "something different."

This took me somewhat by surprise because, although I had not actually mentioned it by name during the previous talks, I had spoken quite a lot about Compassion, seeing that it forms a major part of the practical application of the Dharma. It indicated that some of the people attending my talks had not really heard much at all; maybe their minds were already full to begin with, so couldn't take in any more. I recall beginning one of those talks by explaining the importance of knowing how to listen to a Dharma-talk: by disregarding the physical appearance and personality of the speaker, but paying close attention to what he says, so that the listener may find out, for himself, whether what the speaker is saying is true and relevant or not. Obviously, they had not heard this, nor what I had said about Vegetarianism. Did they only want words, theories and ideas, which they could then repeat to and impress others by?

Is Dharma only something to talk about, an intellectual toy? Obviously, to many people, it *is*. But Dharma can never be understood by such an approach. It must be applied in such a way that it expresses our Buddha-nature or Enlightenment-principle; it is not—or shouldn't be—something apart from daily life. But it seems that we can listen to too many Dharma-talks and read too many books, and become dull and intellectually-constipated thereby, stuck at the level of words and ideas, unable to get off the sand-bank of conceptual thought. This state might continue for a long time. Not being inspired upon first hearing the Dharma—which is the most crucial time—we fall

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into the habit of listening either as if they've heard it all before, or in expectation of hearing something marvelous and mystical, extraordinary and hitherto not thought of. This, of course, is the wrong way to listen to a talk and inevitably brings disappointment. Everything, every moment, is new; nothing remains the same as it was, neither is anything ever repeated. Even if we were to hear exactly the same words, or to read a book over and over, it would still not be the same, for we—our minds more than our bodies—have changed, and we see things differently because of that. Thus, although we might have heard a thing before, we have never heard it before; each time—every moment, everything—is new, including you. That is why subsequent readings of a book reveal things we didn't notice the first or second time. So, to listen with minds already fixed and made up is a guarantee of missing many things.

Actually, the success or failure of a Dharma-talk depends more upon the listeners than upon the speaker, because even if the speaker is dull and boring and has not much to say, an alert and sensitive listener might still extract something of value therefrom. And not only that, but just as neither the match nor the box contains fire, fire may be produced by striking the match against the box, so contact between the minds of the speaker and the listener, via words, might kindle the flame of understanding. Nor need it be anything special, of deep philosophical meaning, but just a meeting of minds in a needle-point of time, and flash!—"Yes, I know!"

Once, while I was living in Bataan Refugee Camp in the Philippines, a photographer gave a slide-show of shots he had taken around the Camp, including some of the sunset, and I recall surprised exclamations of "*Beautiful*," "*Lovely*," "Where is it?" from the refugees. The scenes shown were all around them, but they had not noticed them! Isn't it strange how we will see things and say: "Oh, how beautiful!" only when they

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are pointed out to us by someone else? Where are our eyes? Seldom in the present, seeing what is, that's for sure!

In the same Camp, I met a young man at the departure-area one day, and he said to me: "I have been here for seven months, dreaming of the day of my departure, but now that it's here, I'm sad and don't want to leave, because I see—for the first time, it seems—that the hills around the Camp are green."

Vincent Van Gogh committed suicide in poverty, but his paintings sell today in record, mind-boggling prices. Is it because people really appreciate his art or do they buy his paintings more for the prestige of owning them or as a business-investment? Have they, one wonders, ever closely looked at a real sunflower or an iris—such as he painted—to discover the wonder of life? We don't have to go far to find beauty, nor spend anything to possess it; it is all around us in abundance and we don't need to take out policies to insure it against fire or theft. The whole world is a public art-gallery for those with eyes to see; the changing seasons and weather-types provide us with constantly-renewed exhibitions. But to appreciate it all, we must first have a beauty-base within us, for truly it is said that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." If there is no beauty inside us, it will be hard to see and appreciate the beauty outside and around us. This is why it is so important to try to instill or inspire a sense of appreciation of beauty, a spirit of creativity and art, in our children; if such a spirit can be awoken and nurtured in them, they will be hard to influence into turning to violence, vandalism, destruction and crime. We can, I am sure, be brought to a wonderment of life; some people have it by nature, without having to be shown or guided into it by others, but they are comparatively rare. Those few, however, might help others to understand something of it, so that they come to discover the same thing in themselves. But we must attempt, by any means possible, to awaken this essential faculty in people; we are so much in need of this Love of Life today.

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One time, during lunch at a temple in Sri Lanka, the monk next to me at the dining-table noticed that I didn't partake of a fish-dish, and asked me if I didn't like fish. "Oh, I like fish," I replied, "but when it's alive, not dead."

Certainly, being vegetarian is not everything; far from it. But if, as a regular eater-of-meat, a person takes the step of becoming vegetarian—which may be a little difficult at first, as it takes a while for the body and mind to adjust to the change of diet—it is some measure of her/his willingness to make some personal sacrifice for the sake of the Way. Is it too much to do? Many people will shyly smile and mutter, "I can't do *that*," meaning, of course, they *won't* do it. And so they continue to turn the Killing Wheel instead of trying to slow it down.

Often quoted, by way of justifying meat-eating, are words of the Buddha like these from the *Amaganda Sutta*: "Destroying living creatures, murder, wounding, theft, false-witness, treachery and deception—this, and not the mere eating of flesh, is impure." Yes, this is so, but we must know the context of those words: They were spoken to people who believed they would be defiled by eating meat and, as Jesus later said: it is what comes out of a person which defiles him, not what goes into him. But we are not talking about defilement of people; we are talking about the killing of animals; let us not evade the issue. The animals are slaughtered so people may eat their flesh; this is very clear, is it not? And if it is not clear, I would ask you to consider it. If no-one ate meat, the animals would not be killed for it. Why are we so reluctant to see this? Why are people so unwilling to give up the loathsome habit of eating dead bodies, which begin to putrefy at the moment of death? Why are they so attached to the taste of flesh? If taste is so important to them they should be reminded that vegetables can be prepared in very appetizing ways; in fact, they can be made to look and taste so much like meat that it is sometimes hard to

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tell the difference, but this is merely as a concession to those who find it hard to break the habit of eating meat.

Whatever we undertake, however, we should do it through understanding and not through force or compulsion; if we use our intelligence, we will know what to do without needing lots of rules or commandments. So, when—as sometimes happens—people ask me to "Tell us what to do," I refuse, saying: "If I told you what to do—don't smoke, drink alcohol, etc.—you wouldn't do it, so I'm not going to tell you. Instead, I want to try to help you to find out for yourselves what you should do." This is harder than to be told by someone else what to do, but if you can do it, you will not need to rely upon second-hand information or an external authority. I am saying nothing less than:

***THINK FOR YOURSELF!***



## DROPPING OUT

The following extract is from a letter of Leo Tolstoy, and was sent to me by someone in a Florida jail, who was deeply touched by it, as was I; although it was written at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, much if not all of it is still relevant.

It was ..... written to a Russian woman in 1896 who asked Tolstoy for advice when her “Literature Committee” was closed by the government. The committee had been formed to spread literature among the Russian people, but the committee’s views as to which books were good for people to read did not conform to those of the government. In his letter, Tolstoy reveals that seeking approval from an unjust government is worth little, if anything at all, and examines one route to building true public enlightenment and a just government.

“There are people (we ourselves are such) who realize that our government is very bad, and who struggle against it. There have been two ways of carrying on the struggle; one way is by force. The other way is that which is preached and practiced by you—the method of the “Gradualists”, which consists in carrying on the struggle without violence and within the limits of the law, conquering constitutional right bit by bit.

“Both these methods have been employed unceasingly within my memory for more than half a century, and yet the state of things grows worse and worse, and the power against which we struggle grows ever greater, stronger, and more insolent. Now that both methods have been ineffectually tried for so long a time, we may, it seems to me, see clearly that neither the one nor the other will do—and why this is so.

“The first way is unsatisfactory because (even could an attempt to alter the existing regime by violent means succeed) there would be no guarantee that the new organization would be durable, and that the enemies of that new order would not, at some convenient opportunity, triumph by using violence such as has been used against them, as has

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happened over and over again in France and wherever else there have been revolutions. And so the new order of things, established by violence, would have continually to be supported by violence, i.e., by wrongdoing. And consequently, it would inevitably and very quickly be vitiated like the order it replaced. So I think that, guided by both reason and experience, we may boldly say that this means, besides being immoral, is also irrational and ineffective.

“The other method is, in my opinion, even less effective or rational, because government, having in its hands the whole power (the army, the administration, the Church, the schools, and police), and framing what are called the laws on the basis of which the Liberals wish to resist it—this government knows very well what is really dangerous to it, and will never let people who submit to it, and act under its guidance, do anything that will undermine its authority. For instance, take the case before us: a government such as ours (or any other), which rests on the ignorance of the people, will never consent to their being really enlightened. It will sanction all kinds of pseudo-educational organizations, controlled by itself—as long as those organizations and publications serve its purpose, i.e., stupefy people. But as soon as those organizations, or publications, attempt to cure that on which the power of government rests, i.e., the blindness of people, the government will simply, and without rendering account to anyone, or saying why it acts so and not otherwise, pronounce its ‘veto.’ And therefore, as both reason and experience clearly show, such an illusory, gradual conquest of rights is a self-deception which suits the government admirably, and which it, therefore, is even ready to encourage.

“But not only is this activity irrational and ineffectual, it is also harmful. It is harmful because enlightened, good, and honest people by entering the ranks of the government give it a moral authority which but for them it would not possess. If the government were made up entirely of that coarse element—the violators, self-seekers, and flatterers—who form its core, it could not continue to exist. The fact that honest and enlightened people are found who participate in the affairs of the government gives government whatever it possesses of moral prestige.

“This is one evil resulting from the activity of Liberals who participate in the affairs of government, or who come to terms with it. Another evil of such activity is that, in order to secure opportunities to carry on their work, these highly enlightened and honest people have to begin to



compromise, and so, little by little, come to consider that, for a good end, one may swerve somewhat from truth in word and deed. Entering into compromises—the limits of which can't be foreseen—enlightened and honest people (who alone could form some barrier to the infringements of human liberty by the government) fall at last into a position of complete dependency on government. They receive rewards and salaries from it, and, continuing to imagine they are forwarding liberal ideas, they become the humble servants and supporters of the very order against which they set out to fight.

“Thus, both reflection and experience alike show me that both means of combating government, heretofore believed in, are not only ineffectual, but actually tend to strengthen the power and irresponsibility of government.

“What is to be done? Just what those have done, thanks to whose activity is due that progress towards light and good which has been achieved since the world began, and is still being achieved today. And what is it?

“Merely the simple, quiet, truthful carrying on of what you consider good and needful, quite independently of government, and of whether it likes it or not. In other words: standing up for your rights, not as a member of the Literature Committee, not as a deputy, not as a landowner, not as a merchant, not even as a member of Parliament; but standing up for your rights as a rational and free man, and defending them, not as the rights of local boards or committees are defended, with concessions and compromises, but without any concessions and compromises, is the only way in which moral and human dignity can be defended.

“Only from the basis of a firm stronghold can we conquer all we require. True, the rights of a member of Parliament, or even a member of a local board, are greater than the rights of a plain man; and it seems as if we could do much by using those rights. But the hitch is that in order to obtain the rights of a member of Parliament, or of a committeeman, one has to abandon part of one's rights as a man. And having abandoned part of one's rights as a man, there is no longer any fixed point of leverage, and one can no longer either conquer or maintain any real right. In order to lift others out of a quagmire one must stand on firm

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ground oneself, and if, hoping the better to assist others, you go into the quagmire, you will not pull others out, but will yourself sink in.

“If, in order to pass most liberal programs, it is necessary to take part in public worship, to be sworn, wear a uniform, write mendacious and flattering petitions, and make speeches of a similar character, etc.—then by doing these things and foregoing our dignity as men, we lose much more than we gain, and by trying to reach one definite aim (which very often is not reached) we deprive ourselves of the possibility of reaching other aims which are of supreme importance. Only people who have something which they will on no account and under no circumstance yield can resist a government and curb it. To have power to resist you must stand on firm ground.

“And the government knows this very well, and is concerned, above all else, to worm out of men that which will not yield, in other words, the dignity of man. When that is wormed out of them, government calmly proceeds to do what it likes, knowing that it will no longer meet any real resistance. A man who consents publicly to swear, pronouncing the degrading and mendacious words of the oath, or to ask of the head censor whether he may, or may not, express such and such thoughts, etc.—such a man is no longer feared by government. Alexander II said he did not fear the Liberals because he knew they could all be bought, if not with money, then with honors.

“People who take part in government, or work under its direction, may deceive themselves or their sympathizers by making a show of struggling; but those against whom they struggle—the government—know quite well, by the strength of the resistance experienced, that these people are not really pulling, but are only pretending to. And our government knows this with respect to the Liberals, and constantly tests the quality of the opposition, and finding that genuine resistance is practically non-existent, it continues its course in full assurance that it can do what it likes with such opponents. The state of things is becoming worse and worse. And I think all this would not have happened if those enlightened, honest people who are now occupied in Liberal activity on the basis of legality, had merely claimed their rights as men, abstaining from taking part in government or in any business bound up with government.

“You wish to make trial by jury a mere formality; that is your business, but we will not serve as judges, or as advocates, or as jurymen.

You wish to organize cadet corps, or classical high schools, in which military exercises and the Orthodox faith are taught; that is your affair, but we will not teach in such schools, or send our children to them, but will educate our children as seems to us right. You decide to reduce the local government boards to impotence; we will not take part in it. You prohibit the publication of literature that displeases you; you may seize books and punish the printers, but you cannot prevent our speaking and writing, and we shall continue to do so. You order us to serve in the army; we will not do so, because wholesale murder is as opposed to our conscience as individual murder, and above all, because the promise to murder whomsoever a commander may tell us to murder is the meanest act a man can commit.

**“What can a government do with a man who is not willing publicly to lie with uplifted hand, or who is not willing to send his children to an establishment which he considers bad, or who is not willing to learn to kill people, or who says and writes what he thinks and feels? By prosecuting such a man, government secures for him general sympathy, making him a martyr, and it undermines the foundations on which it is itself built, for in so acting, instead of protecting human rights, it itself infringes them.**

**“And it is only necessary for those good, enlightened, and honest people, whose strength is now wasted in revolutionary, socialistic, or liberal activity, harmful to themselves and to their cause, to begin to act thus, and a nucleus of honest, enlightened, and moral people would form around them, united in the same thoughts and the same feelings; and to this nucleus the ever wavering crowd of average people would at once gravitate, and public opinion—the only power which subdues governments—would become evident, demanding freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, justice, and humanity. And as soon as public opinion is formulated, not only would it be impossible to close the “Literature Committee”, but all those inhuman organizations against which the revolutionists and the liberals are now struggling would disappear of themselves.**

**“So those two methods of opposing the government have been tried, both unsuccessfully, and it now remains to try a third and a last method, one not yet tried, but one which, I think, cannot but be successful. Briefly, that means this: that all enlightened and honest people should try to be as good as they can, and not even good in all res-**

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pects, but only in one; namely in observing one of the most elementary of virtues—to be honest, and not to lie, but to act and speak so that your motives should be intelligible to an affectionate 7-year-old boy; to act so that your boy should not say, “But why, papa, did you say so-and-so, and now you do and say something quite different?” This method seems very weak, and yet I am convinced it is this method, and this method only, that has moved humanity since the race began. Only because there were straight men, truthful and courageous, who made no concessions that infringed their dignity as men, have all those beneficial revolutions been accomplished of which mankind now have the advantage, from the abolition and torture and slavery up to liberty of speech and of conscience. Nor can this be otherwise, for what conscience (the highest feeling man possesses of the truth accessible to him) demands, is always, and in all respects, the activity most fruitful and most necessary at the given time. Only a man who lives according to his conscience can have influence on people, and only activity that accords with one’s conscience can be useful.”

There are keys to many locks in this passage. Which of them should I use first?

When I was in school, the teachers used to appoint bully-boys—and girls—as prefects, to do their dirty work for them. Unable to control them by discipline, they found it easier to recruit them by flattering them with a higher position than the other students, and a little bit of power. We had some awful types as prefects—regular tyrants, they were—and few who were offered such positions turned them down. Power is so seductive and corruptive.

It is often said that every man has his price and can be bought. I don’t know if this is absolutely true. Are there really none whose principles are so strong that they can resist all offers, all attempts to make them compromise their stands?

Personally, I find it rather disgusting that Paul McCartney is now styled *Sir* Paul McCartney. It isn’t that it makes a mockery of the knighthood, but that he accepted instead of rejected it.

## **DROPPING OUT }**

He, from a working-class background, and as a member of the most-famous music-group in history, was a spokesman for his generation, and was tremendously successful as such. When the Beatles broke up, however, and he went solo, the songs he wrote and sang were mushy and sentimental, quite different from those he wrote with John Lennon, who was clearly the backbone of the group.

Early on in their career, in 1963, the Beatles performed at the annual *Royal Command Performance*, before members of the royal family, and John declared, "Those of you in the cheap seats clap your hands; the rest just rattle your jewelry". He was a rebel, had his own dignity, and refused to bow and scrape before others; he later returned his MBE medal to the Queen, as a protest against Britain's support of America's involvement in Vietnam. I can't imagine him approving of Paul's acceptance of a knighthood; it is a betrayal of all they stood for. He can have his knighthood and immense wealth, but he lost his dignity and integrity in getting them, and was absorbed into and by the system he earlier defied. I recall how they shocked the establishment by being among the first to wear their hair long; they symbolized revolution and rebellion to the older generation, which greatly feared their influence on the young. And now, the generation that was young then, and of which I was a member, has, in turn, become the establishment, with opinions of its own about 'the young generation'. It's always like this. No-one remains young, and our minds change.

At this point, let me come out with it and say that I was and am a 'drop-out'; just look at me! I cannot and do not deny it, as this is the way I have come. I dropped out several times, not just once. I dropped out of the normal, workaday world to become a world-wanderer, getting drawn into things along the way that I now in some ways regret, but for which I am also grateful. I am not—like Silly Billy—going to admit to smoking marijuana but claiming that I didn't inhale. I both smoked *and*

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inhaled it. Why? Because I was part of *another* system, and not yet able to stand alone and say “No”. How hard it would have been to avoid those things in the ‘Sixties, traveling where and how I did!

Now, as I look back, I feel embarrassed at the silly things I did, but cannot deny I did them, and why should I? It is up to me to try to extract something good and useful from those days. I am now in a position to explain to others why things I did then were foolish and unskillful, and that there are better ways of opening one’s mind than by using a battering-ram.

When I finally saw how stupid and empty was the world of *that* drop-out, with its drug-use, and selfish hedonism, I cut my hair short as a symbol of turning my back on it, and dropped out again. By this time, however, I had discovered Dharma, so I had something to *drop into*, something better than I had ever known before or since, something which has sustained me through times of difficulty, and enabled me to resist being absorbed into another kind of system, something that gives me the strength to stand alone at the times I need to do so.

I became a monk. And if a *monk* is not a drop-out, what *is* he? It is the ultimate in dropping-out, is it not? To change so radically is to say—without words—that the life-style we have changed from is not worth much to us. It is a criticism of the accepted or standard life-style, with job, house, family, and so on. Why does the monk drop out and leave all this behind? He doesn’t have to do; no-one forces him to; it’s his choice. Is it worth it? What does he get in place of that which he walks out on? The respect of the lay-people, with their bows and offerings? A seat on a higher level? A comfortable life in a building bigger than the one he left? Titles and fame? If so, how sad; such things are part of the life he is supposed to have rejected, are they not? They are *Mara’s daughters!* If this is all he gets, and is content with such baubles, he hasn’t really dropped out at all, and has not made it; he’s failed!

The Buddha was the greatest drop-out of all. Look what *He* walked out on: He left behind a life that most people of that time would have done anything for, and left it without looking back. And see what became of His dropping out: not only did He become enlightened Himself, but was able to lead so many others to enlightenment, and His influence continues until now.

More than 2,500 years on, however, we are back where He began, with a fully-formed system, an establishment, an organized hierarchy similar to the caste-system He so strongly rejected and denounced. Is it to become part of all this that we become monks, or to find something of what He found?

Just by donning a robe and shaving one's head is enough for some people to respect us to the point of worshipping us. Isn't something wrong here? No-one bows to the Queen of England these days (not to mention the President of the US, who is rather a joke now); people just shake her hand. How come, then, that people are still bowing to monks? Isn't this practice out-of-date now, a thing to be outgrown? Monks who are worthy of respect neither need nor want such excessive respect, as they surely have something better and less fickle than public opinion. Those who are not worthy of it should not be shown it, as it can be more intoxicating than whiskey, and give rise to vanity, pride and other unwholesome qualities. There should still be respect, of course, but the respect of common courtesy,<sup>1</sup> not that of unrealistic worship which expects something in return.

Respect should be earned, not just bestowed as a matter of course and tradition. And if it doesn't come, never mind;

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<sup>1</sup> Not that courtesy is common; in fact, it becomes rarer and rarer as time goes on; I fear that this is one of the results of Democracy, whereby people are given equal rights and therefore think they are equal. No such thing! That is ignorance!

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there are better things than that, things that do not come and go. Find yourself!

Tolstoy spoke about being honest. It is a most difficult thing, for we must begin with ourselves. How to be honest with, and not deceive ourselves? It means to confront, acknowledge, accept, understand and overcome the image of ourselves that has been painstakingly built up over the years since our birth. This image is seldom accurate and usually very *inaccurate*; it is not us, or even a reflection of us. We and others have constructed it—consciously *and* unconsciously—to help us cope with life, to enable us to play a part and *act* on the stage of life. And what parts we play! But do we realize it is only a play, and that we are only acting? I mean, look at the popular ‘soapies’ that people like to watch: *Peyton Place*, *Dynasty*, *Dallas*, *Coronation Street*, and so on: they all feature characters that we like, dislike, admire, respect, deplore, loath, etc. But those characters, in *real* life, are probably quite different than they are on screen. They know they are only acting, and doing and saying things that they themselves would find amusing, shameful or loathsome in real life; but the things they would laugh or rage at if ‘real’, make the play interesting. If asked about things they said or did *on screen*, they would not deny them, and would probably give quite a good account of and explanation for; they would not feel ashamed of them, otherwise no-one could be found to play those parts.

In *real* life, however, dare we be honest about the lower, selfish motives and feelings that we all have? Would—*could*—we ever admit to being jealous of another, for example? It's not easy, is it? It's much easier to rationalize, excuse, sugar-coat and cover them up, even if our attempts to do so are transparent to other people. Why do we do so? Why do we deceive ourselves so much? It is because of our immaturity, and the image that is so important for us to maintain. Actually, we fool no-one, not even ourselves; our efforts are a waste of time,



and time is not money—as the old saying has it—but *life*. We waste our lives with our posturing and image-holding; it serves no purpose, and only causes suffering.

Can you—*dare* you—admit to disliking someone, and face and examine that feeling? Can you be honest instead of hypocritical about it? Could you say to that person: “I don’t like you?”, and still carry on a working relationship with him/her, not letting your dislike rule everything, but putting it aside as a personal and subjective thing? Why is liking people so important? Why is it so important to us for others to like us? Are we not too concerned about others liking us? The desire to be liked is an impediment, and causes much trouble.

Are *you*—am *I*—a nice person? If you were someone else, would you like you? What are the qualities that are likable and unlikable in us? We are so complex, and such a mixture of many different qualities, are we not? Which of us is so complete, so perfect, that there is nothing about us that we do not feel ashamed of, and would not like others to know about? Can we be honest about our imperfections and feelings, and accept ourselves as we are? Yes, we can. If we love, and if we feel loved, we can open up, without fear or shame.

When we are in love, we are more aware, and enjoy life; we live nearer to the moment, seeing it as an adventure. Love is an essential ingredient of the spiritual life—not the sensual, self-centered love fixed on a person as a possession, not the love that always asks more for self, but the love that sees and feels the unity of things, and radiates outward.

## **LOVE LIBERATES.**

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## **CHRISTIANITY'S CORPORATE RAIDER**

"Christmas would not be the same without the Emperor Constantine. JOHN MACGREGOR, of Melbourne, tells the story of the takeover that changed the course of Christianity. (Reprinted from a newspaper article of 1988).

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"In AD 312, not long before what we now celebrate as Christmas, history's largest corporate takeover was set in train. The effects of this takeover were profound. It fatally damaged the movement founded some 250 years earlier by the apostles of Jesus of Nazareth. In the longer term, it all but dictated the history of the Western world for the next 1,600 years.

"The strategist behind the successful bid was the Emperor Constantine. The takeover vehicle was his family company, the Roman Empire (West). The directors Constantine convinced to capitulate, with the standard mixture of naked threats and promised rewards, were the bishops of the target company—the fledgling Christian Church.

"Constantine used the new corporation as an expansion-vehicle—so successfully, in fact, that the one-time fringe-group became the ideological force behind the world's major economic power.

"The historic merger between the Catholic Church and the Roman Empire had its origins in a simple dream. On the night of 27th October AD 312—the night before he was to lay siege to Rome in the hope of consolidating the Empire under himself—Constantine dreamed of the Greek Letters *Chi-Rho*, then the symbol of the persecuted minority-group, the Christians. He woke with the words: "*By this sign you shall conquer!*" ringing in his ears. By dawn, every soldier's shield had been painted with the monogram. Despite the defenders' superior

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numbers, Constantine, by the end of that day, had captured the city and claimed the mantle of Caesar.

"In gratitude to the Christian God, Constantine began worshipping it (alongside others he favored), and took the young Church under his wing. So began the rapid process by which a pacifist sect was transformed into a creed for a series of bloody conquerors. History tells us the Church converted Constantine. The reality is that *he* converted *it!*

"Constantine was a lackluster Christian, even after AD 312. He had his own son killed—and his wife boiled alive in her bath! But it was this theological illiterate who summoned the various Christian leaders—from as far afield as India in the east, and Britain in the west—to the historic council of Nicaea in the summer of AD 325. [Nicaea is in the north-west of modern Turkey]. The reason for this first 'World Council' was to put an end to the squabbling among Jesus Christ's heirs—factions of whom were describing each other, in their righteous fury, as "maniacs", "atheists", "cuttlefish", and "eels".

"The big source of contention was Christ's divinity. Was he a human-being who had been given life to serve God's will in a special, divine way—or had he been inseparable from God since the beginning of time?

"The delegates rolled in from every corner of the Empire. 'Saint' Nicholas (the original Santa Claus) arrived from Asia Minor. The renunciate Jacob of Nisibis appeared in goatskins, pursued by a cloud of gnats. Most delegates were bishops, and a bit more on the gaudy side. Nothing, however, to compare with Constantine himself, who appeared dripping jewelry and gold. It was this quite-worldly potentate, uneducated in theological matters, a mass-murderer (even since his 'conversion')—whose favorite god was probably Sol Invictus, the Syrian sun-god—who then made a decision that altered the nature of the Christian religion as no other decision has.

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"Constantine sided against the *Antiochene* party—who believed Christ to be human—in favor of the *Alexandrians*, who had pronounced him indistinguishable from the Father himself. The delegates were 'invited' to sign a document Constantine had drawn up to formalize this decision. Those who signed were to stay on in Nicaea as Constantine's guests at his 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Those who refused were to be banished immediately.

"All but two signed. However, on returning home, several signatories realized they had betrayed their consciences, and wrote to the Emperor accordingly. Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia wrote: "*We committed an impious act, oh Prince, by subscribing to a blasphemy from fear of you*".

"It was too late. The ink had dried. Jesus, against the evidence of the Gospels themselves, had become "Very God" for all time. Mary, a mother of several children who had never drawn much theological attention, soon became "Ever Virgin" and "Mother of God". (Difficult though it may have seemed after such a good start, she improved her position through the centuries: in 1854 she was pronounced incapable of sin from the moment of her conception, and in this century, Pope Pius XII threw in the title, "Queen of Heaven").

"After the takeover, a major problem for Constantine and the bishops was the dissident members in the original movement. Many of these were Gnostic Christians. These adherents to Christ's original, inward-looking teaching were finding themselves about as relevant as a Menshevik after the Russian revolution.

"In answer to these internal critics, Christianity quickly learned a trick that would stand it, and other great political powers, in good stead thereafter. It pronounced them the transgressors of the creed. Just as Stalin branded many of his former colleagues traitors, the bishops branded the Gnostic Christians heretics. Their scriptures were banned and burned,

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and they themselves were, with the help of the Roman Empire's soldiery, hunted down and killed.

"So who were these people? *Gnosis* is a Greek word meaning intuitive spiritual knowledge. Gnostics set this experience, which affected them profoundly, above all dogma and ritual. They said "gnosis" was, first and foremost, what Christ had come to teach.

"Gnostics worshipped a supreme being who was both male and female: the *Matropater*, or Mother/Father God. This recognition extended to Earth, too: women in Gnostic communities had equality with men. Those in today's Church who refuse to countenance female-ordination look a bit silly when we consider that the very earliest Church, the one closest to the time of the Apostles, had female priests and female bishops.

"It is important to examine the Gnostics' credentials as Christians. After all, if they were just an eccentric minority, modern Christians can rest easy that their tenets are not part of the true Christian tradition.

"In 1945, a significant scriptural discovery took place: the *Nag Hammadi* find in Egypt. In an earthenware jar a meter high, buried in the side of a hill, an Egyptian peasant discovered 13 ancient leather-bound codexes (books). The 52 scriptures contained in them still represent almost the sum-total of our knowledge of Gnostic Christianity (Constantine's bonfires had been effective).

"Whereas the four 'New Testament' gospels were written between AD 60 and AD 110, one of the most-significant Gnostic texts, the 'Gospel of Thomas', contains material that is dated by Harvard's Professor Helmut Koester to AD 50-100, that is, possibly even earlier than the 'New Testament' gospels.

"Some Gnostic texts are sourced near the same period, but others were written at various times throughout the first three centuries AD. The identities of their authors are no more or

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less distinguished than those of the 'New Testament'. That is, like 'New Testament' texts, they often take the name of an Apostle, or other divine figure, who would not actually have penned them. Thus we have the 'Gospel of Philip', the 'Apocalypse of Peter', the 'Book of Thomas the Contender', and the 'Gospel of Mary'.

"[It should be pointed out that few scholars today believe the 'New Testament' gospels were actually written by the Apostles Matthew or Mark, or *their* followers, Luke or John].

"Perhaps a second question, where the Gnostics' credentials are concerned, should be as to the number of early Christians who regarded themselves as Gnostic. According to Elaine Pagels, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, Gnostic and 'Orthodox' populations may have been in the same ballpark—at least until the purges began.

"The Gnostics' celebration of the feminine was not the only reason they were purged by the emerging patriarchy. Christianity was, in the first three centuries AD, quickly becoming a quite external religion; that is, it increasingly tended to deal in behavioral codes rather than religious experience. The Gnostics protested vigorously about this trend. They saw the orthodox clergy as 'waterless canals'. Their own clergy were often chosen on an *ad-hoc* basis, by the drawing of lots. This casual approach to holy-office enraged the orthodox.

*"Let no-one do anything pertaining to the Church without the bishop ... To join with the bishop is to join with the Church; to separate oneself from the bishop is to separate oneself not only from the Church, but from God".*

"This was written by the orthodox writer Ignatius, who was, needless to say, a bishop.

"The Gnostics wanted to stick to the historical facts of Christ's life where possible, and above all to retain his empha-

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sis on the inner spiritual life. Thus, they treated the resurrection as a symbol of spiritual rebirth rather than as a historical event. Today, interestingly, we have good (non-Christian) evidence for the crucifixion—but little for the resurrection.

"The virgin-birth, too, they regarded as a latter-day invention. And the Gnostics had further 'undesirable tendencies': they questioned the value of suffering and martyrdom. They worshipped a succession of masters, who came in the centuries after Jesus. And they did meditation. Here is "Peter" describing his initiation by Christ:

*"The Savior said to me ... 'Put your hands upon your eyes ... And say what you see' ... And there came unto me fear with joy, for I saw a new light, greater than the light of day'.*

"Last, many Gnostics had a more relaxed view of sex than, say, St. Paul. The would-be censors of Scorsese's "Last Temptation of Christ" would probably be interested in the following, from the 'Gospel of Philip':

*"The companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples, and used to kiss her often on her mouth'.*

"The Gnostics' emphasis on Christ's 'kingdom of heaven within' deeply embarrassed a Church dedicated, increasingly, to establishing its power-base in the outer world. The Gnostics had to go. But the 3<sup>rd</sup> century 'Apocalypse of Peter' gets in a parting shot. Here is Christ's chilling prophesy to Peter on Christianity's future:

*"And they praise the men of propagation of falsehood, those who will come after you. And they will cleave to the name of a dead man, thinking that they will become pure. But they will ... fall into the hand of an evil, cunning man, and they will be ruled heretically'*

"The purge by the "men of the propagation of falsehood" was so effective that, until the Nag Hammadi find, we knew

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more about the Gnostics from Church denunciations than from their own scriptures.

"The Gnostic movement recurred from time to time—most notably in 13<sup>th</sup> century France. Here the Cathars, of the Languedoc region, also had masters (of both sexes) who revealed gnosis. Cathars believed in reincarnation, recognized the feminine principle in spirituality, meditated, were mainly vegetarian—and were essentially non-violent. Coveting their fertile lands, but ostensibly because of their 'heretical' views, in 1209 the Pope sent an army of 30,000 into the Languedoc.

"Every Cathar man, woman and child was put to the sword. Every town and crop was razed, and virtually every relic of their civilization annihilated.

"Examples from Francis of Assisi and St. Joan right down to Mother Theresa and Martin Luther King show us that Christianity has thrown up some powerful forces for good. Yet one wonders why the establishment itself has so often been on the side of the oppressors. Do, as Plato told us, great ideas always degenerate within social institutions? With the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights so recently behind us, that may be something to ponder through Christmas".

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N.B. The conclusions expressed in this article are his own, but the author wishes to acknowledge the research-help he has periodically received from Princeton University's Professor Elaine Pagels.

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## JUST IDEAS?

**S**OME TIME AGO, I WAS SPEAKING with someone about the violence in society, and he maintained that there was nothing he could do to change it, as that is just the way society is. I reminded him that society is not something apart from ourselves, but that it is made up of individuals, of units like he and I, to which he replied: "Well, I do my share; I don't kill, steal, or cheat", considering his not-doing as doing, which of course, it is. "Anyway", he went on, "there's no such thing as 'good' or 'bad'; they are just ideas".

Well, certainly, many of our ideas about good and bad are somewhat flexible and subject to change, and what is 'good' in a particular time and place might not be good in another. Many Muslims, for example, practice polygamy, and it's quite alright and 'good' for a Muslim man to have a number of wives, but in the West, where the culture is Christian-based in its concepts of morality—it is illegal, and therefore 'bad'.

Some religions and cults have practiced human-sacrifice, and perhaps it still goes on in parts today, though not openly; animal-sacrifice, however, *is* still practiced in various countries. And in India, according to a rather-obscure Hindu doctrine, immolation by widows on their husbands' funeral-pyres (but never the other way around, as with many things in patriarchal religion), was considered an act of incalculable merit. During their 'period of tenure' in India, however, the British did not see it as such, and outlawed the custom. But, in 1987, with fundamentalism on the rise among Hindus, too, there was a well-publicized case of widow-burning, with prominent Hindu priests speaking out publicly in praise of it.

Like a number of our laws, some of our ideas and beliefs are antiquated and questionable. In our conceit, we bipeds, considering ourselves 'the highest of God's creations', have

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divorced ourselves from the rest of Nature and deem ourselves special and different—which, of course, we are, but not in the way we think—with the right to exploit Nature as we see fit. Furthermore, not being content to consider humans the highest creatures, we have divided ourselves into smaller and ever-smaller groups, inventing or imagining divisions where none exist, so that even religions which sprang up as divisions, have split up into numerous sects and sub-sects—each claiming to be the only 'right' one, and therefore looking on all others as 'wrong' and sometimes 'evil'; Christianity undoubtedly holds the record for this, with hundreds and hundreds—nay, *thousands*—of often-conflicting sects. It is to the 'credit' of humans—and, moreover, humans who professed to be religious—that such concepts and organizations as 'the Chosen and the Damned', Apartheid, 'Holy War', the Ku Klux Klan, etc., have come into existence, things that are not to be found in the rest of Nature.

In the Animal World, to be sure, the 'Law of the Jungle' prevails, and 'big fish eats little fish' in a matter of 'kill or be killed'. We humans pride ourselves on being different, higher, and better than animals, but are we, really? Certainly, we are different in that we possess the ability to speak and communicate with each other about almost any matter, which animals cannot do; we walk upright on two legs, our hands can make, hold and use tools, we have mastered fire, and we cook our food. But perhaps the greatest difference between animals and humans is that we are not bound by instinct, as they are, and have the power of *choice*. Does this make us better or morally-superior to the animals, though? Not necessarily. In itself, it is neither good nor bad, but with it, we have the capacity for good or bad, such as no other animal, and today, we have it in greater measure than ever before. And what do we do with it? Sadly, we often misuse our god-like ability to choose, and cause disaster; sometimes, it seems that we would be better off without it, and function by instinct, like the 'lower' animals.

Tigers or sharks have no choice about being carnivores; their systems need flesh, and they must kill in order to survive. But are they bad or evil because of that? Not at all; they are just following their natures, and if we understand that, we keep out of their reach. Bees make honey and chickens lay eggs, which we like, and therefore we say they are 'good'; but are they good just because we utilize and exploit them? Of course not; bees and chickens, too, are only following their natures, and have no thought about being 'good'.

Now, while some things that we call 'good' and 'bad' are subjective and change with time and place, other things do not, and are recognized by any and all societies as such. Murder, robbery, blackmail, extortion, rape, mugging, etc., are regarded by all societies as bad and wrong, and surely, not even people like dictators or leaders of totalitarian regimes, if asked about them, would say such activities are good, even though they might practice them themselves. "But", said my friend, "criminals would not agree with that; they think that what they are doing is good, otherwise they wouldn't do it". "Do they?" I said. "do they really? If they do, it means that their minds must be very, very small, so small that they are unable to think of anyone except themselves. But even criminals love their families and wish to be happy, do they not? And we can hardly imagine them being happy if someone savagely beat them up or robbed them, or kidnapped and murdered their children, which means that even they recognize the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, but as yet have not the strength of character to avoid doing what is wrong and bad".

As we all probably know, it is easier to fall down a tree or mountain than to climb one, and it's easier to do bad than do good. We all have the capacity to do evil, and most of us entertain evil thoughts at times; nevertheless, we must try to prevent evil thoughts becoming evil deeds, and strive to do good instead, for our own sakes as well as for the sake of the commu-

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nity we live in. And if we can share this with others and help them understand, we will have done inestimable good. And it is my aim, by my writings, to share something with others.

Some people might say it is mere intellection, but I would deny that, because the world is made up of ideas—ideas of nationalism, religion, politics, economy, etc., etc.—and some of these ideas are silly, wrong, divisive and dangerous. If we would examine our ideas and replace wrong ideas with right, the world would be better off, because as we think, so we act; our actions are preceded by thoughts. Therefore, I make no apology for writing in what might appear to be an intellectual or theoretical manner, for if we are to have a direction in life, we must first think about it clearly, otherwise we shall just be carried along by the current.

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“People often say that humans have always eaten animals, as if this is a justification for continuing the practice.

According to this logic, we should not try to prevent people from murdering other people, since this has also been done since the earliest times.”

Isaac Bashevis Singer, Nobel Laureate

“You have just dined, and however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Fate*.

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# **SOME BASIC HUMAN PROBLEMS**

**AN ESSAY BY CLYDE O. DAVIS, USA**

**T**HE PROBLEMS OF HUMANITY that will be discussed in this essay are problems resulting from human beginnings and changes that have occurred since some of the human crowd became more or less civilized. The problems result from ignorance, misuse of the uniquely human brain, the genetic residue from our long existence as pre-humans, and the consequences of uncontrolled human population growth. These are obviously interrelated. This will be an outline rather than a full discussion, calling attention to where, in my opinion, the human experiment has failed and may soon be ended by further failures.

**W**hen the hominid line split off from the anthropoid ape-line several million years ago, the hominid genome was already full of genetic material appropriate for the survival at that time of this new species of wild animal. Brains, once they began to evolve, evidently developed slowly. One bit of fossil evidence of this slow development is that from the time these earliest hominids first began to use unmodified stone tools until the tools (hammers, cutting-stones, etc.) show evidence of having been shaped or improved, a million or more years passed. In any case, several million years passed before there is much evidence that the slowly evolving human brain got much use. During the very long hunter-gatherer phase of human evolution (which still persists among primitive tribes in several countries) there was minimal intellectual progress. Primitive people were as ignorant as all other wild animals. Our newly-brainy primitive ancestors had to rely heavily on imagination and emotion in their reactions to life and nature. And many present-day people are similarly dependent on imagination and emotion. Use of

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reason and intellect are neither encouraged nor required in many current societies.

There are many reasons why homo-sapiens, the only brainy animal, has for at least hundreds of thousands of years resisted learning to use the unique human brain. The first reason is that habits of living and behavior acquired during millions of years of pre-human existence have become instinctive and resist interference by reason or thought. Among these instinctive behaviors are the following:

- (1)** Most humans prefer to follow a leader, and there is a tendency of many leaders, intoxicated by the power of leadership, to embark on programs harmful to others. Many political, religious and military leaders have been responsible for destructive and pointless wars, including attempts to destroy entire populations, cultures or religions. Or they have become powerful dictators, harmful to the populace they controlled. A strong propensity for war rather than peaceful solutions to problems is a primitive and still-current human failing.
- (2)** Human males have always desired to dominate, control, own and rule females; few societies have advanced very far beyond this primitive instinct. Religions have sanctified, and laws been passed in support of, the male prerogative.
- (3)** Fear of strangers, suspicion of things unfamiliar and unknown, unwillingness to co-operate, compromise or seek peaceful solutions in relation with foreigners.
- (4)** Tendency of all human societies and indigenous groups to believe that they are the preferred creation of their God or Gods and that all others are inferior.
- (5)** Greed, which drives economic systems worldwide, is another undesirable, or at least antisocial human trait, as is selfishness. The economic 'system' which we humans have allowed to develop during the past few centuries, promotes the

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accumulation of various kinds of 'wealth' by people who already have too much of it, and the giving up of more than they can spare by a great many others. The system is a world-wide endorsement of greed, selfishness and indifference.

**(6)** The discovery that people are merely one of the many varieties of animals that have evolved on earth has come too late to enable humans to take such steps as might now be taken to cut back drastically on the rate of human population increase and thereby save some of the remaining wildlife. When we still thought we were God's chosen, and that our future was not on earth but in heaven, we could not feel responsible for the mess we were making of earth.

The foregoing is far from an exhaustive list of some of the very troublesome instinctive behaviors of people who are unwilling, unable, or simply unaccustomed to using their remarkable brains to become truly civilized. The principle use of the intellect by humans to date has been to enable them to better do many of the nasty, unsociable and uncivilized things that they have been doing for millions of years. War, for example, has become the most perfected, most intellectually-advanced activity of the human species; our ability to kill each other in enormous numbers over vast distances in a very short time is by far our greatest technical accomplishment. And it represents our greatest misuse of brains.

**W**ild animals, lacking the kind of intellect that has evolved in humans, live by instinct alone. They are born, enjoy a frisky, playful infancy, learn how to survive as adults, become mature, do what they can to stay alive and reproduce, get old and die, or are killed before they are old. Death is the end of an individual animal so far as anyone knows, and ultimate extinction, if not metamorphosis into other species, has been the end of entire species during the past millions of years of evolution.

**H**umans, when they became able to think with their newly-evolved brains, soon decided that they were too important to

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live and die like other animals. So they dreamed up the soul, and an afterlife, available, originally, to everyone. Then religions developed, primarily to maintain proper contact with an imaginary supernatural realm, and religion decreed that only certain people were qualified for an afterlife. In most societies where strong organized religions developed, life on earth became less important than the theoretical posthumous life. So the thrust of religion, especially Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and even Buddhism, became how best to prepare for a life after death, in spite of the lack of evidence that human animals are different from other animals with respect to a possible postmortem existence. This important aspect of religion is now seen as simply human arrogance and hubris.

**What** this means is that whereas during the millions of years before brains evolved, people presumably were as well-adjusted and satisfied as other animals, with a life consisting of a happy childhood, a maturity spent in staying alive, raising young and doing whatever the family or troop did, with no thought of why or what or whence. Life itself was enough, as it is for all animals. But some time after human brains developed, the brainy ones began to consider life a mystery and to wonder what could be the ultimate purpose of these often difficult and unsatisfying years or even of highly-satisfying though brief years on earth. Needless to say, no satisfying answers have ever been found.

The religions of the world have all attempted to supply some purposes or reasons for being, or goals and values of life, derived from imagination, myths, experience and pure speculation. These are all now collapsing in light of what scientific research and study have begun to reveal about the human condition. Traditional religion seems totally unable to adapt to the view of life that is revealed by science. A new philosophy/religion is needed, based on and compatible with what is now known about life in general and human life in particular.



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Much will be learned in future years which will make possible revisions in the conclusions reached at this point.

Human babies and juveniles, like other young mammals, are not bothered by brains. They simply enjoy life, unless conditions of life are desperate because of poverty, adult misbehavior, etc. Life flows on happily into adulthood and often beyond, except for the few who are impelled by brains to begin wondering what it is all about.

The religious answers to questions about the ultimate value purpose of life are clearly meaningless; they were fabricated by ignorant but imaginative people who decided that the vicissitudes, uncertainties and disappointments of this life could be tolerated because a new post-mortem life awaited for at least some of them who accepted the religious promises. Religious belief is an antidote to brains; a rule of traditional religion is that no-one should use reason about religious matters but should simply accept, without question, whatever dogma or belief is offered. This solves the distressing problem of the human brain by requiring that people forget that they have brains and behave instead like brainless animals, such as sheep. This behavior is evidently not difficult for most people. During the past two millennia, a high proportion of the earth's population has faithfully adhered to one of the four or five major religions.

The control of population behavior by religion amply illustrates the fact that hundreds of generations after the evolution of brains, humans still do not know what use to make of brains in relation to the life experience. One reason for this may be that the variety of brain (from highly-talented prodigy to cretin) is extremely variable; many people are simply not very bright; the proportion of extremely-intelligent, talented and brainy individuals is infinitesimally small. The total number of people whose brains and abilities have made possible such 'progress' as homo-sapiens has made over the past 10,000 years is per-

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haps 10,000 in all parts of the earth, of the 10 or more billion who have ever lived.

The fundamental human problem underlying all the stupid and silly mistakes of humanity, it seems to me, is the failure to realize that what made humans different from all other life on earth was the human brain. Because we chose to ignore brains we have wasted the great chance we had to realize our full potential as a super species, or at least the only species capable of trying to avoid ultimate extinction, which to date has been the story of nearly all earthly life.

**W**e have found little to do in life to make the few years of existence really enjoyable and memorable. The paucity of goals and accomplishments is really dramatized by the fact that for religious people, who comprise nearly half of the current population of about 7 billion, this life is a kind of sentence to be served while awaiting the promised post-mortem existence. Happy infancy, struggling adolescence, an adulthood devoted to adaptation to the norms, requirements and permissions of whatever society we happen to be born into, an old age that is often a sad, lonely, useless wait for the end, are not enough of life for creatures with human brains. Somehow, during the past 100,000 years, the entire species became misdirected and frightened; we continued to behave like the pre-human animals we have been for millions of years and failed to understand our new situation and status. We are now so numerous that our sheer numbers on this little earth are overwhelming the ability of the planet to supply us with the water, food, breathable-air and other resources needed to sustain life. And it may now be too late to learn how to make life what it should have become long ago after our wonderful brains evolved.

**K**nowing even the little we now know, namely, that much we have done to ourselves for thousands of years has been in response to our primitive instincts and almost total ignorance, we can already see much that could be done to emancipate us

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from the ignorance and superstition of the past. Getting rid of all religion would be an admirable though impossible first step. Religion is of interest primarily because it keeps reminding us of where we have been, how frightened of death and even of life we were, how anxious to have answers to unanswerable questions, how silly to let religious bigots and idiots, however well-meaning, take charge of all aspects of our lives.

A second step would be to finally understand that what we can do with life depends on what we bring to it. The most important thing we can ever do is to give every child the best-possible chance to find out what his/her interests, talents, innate abilities, etc. are, and to see that each gets a good chance to develop. This is because people apparently need to be active and doing things. The most satisfying lives are spent helping others, being skilled at whatever society values, or at what a person feels impelled to do provided it does no harm to others. All these are culturally determined, or permitted. A child born in the so-called *Developed Countries* has a far richer and more satisfying possible life than children in many *Undeveloped* countries, or than his/her parents and grandparents had 30 to 60 years ago. Thanks to the Renaissance and Reformation here in the West, which broke the stranglehold Christianity had for 1,500 years on human freedom to learn about life and the universe, we have enjoyed 500 years of increasing knowledge about ourselves and everything existing and accessible in nature. The resulting technology has greatly extended the range of what there is to know and do in life. Children of the computer-age have much more to challenge the mind and imagination than did children of the hunter-gatherers of a few thousand years ago, or even of farm children a century ago here in the U.S.

Where religion will permit change, people in the undeveloped countries will soon have access to all of the knowledge that science is accumulating, and their children will find life as

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interesting and great as ours increasingly are finding it. Provided, of course, that they have the religious freedom to limit population-growth to the point where they can afford to live decent lives.

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[During my 1999 trip in the U.S., I had the pleasure of meeting and staying briefly with the author of the above, **Clyde Davis**, a thoughtful and humorous man of ninety who had spent his working-life as a chemist with DuPont. He presented me with a bundle of articles he had written in recent years—heart-felt writings about things he had long pondered on and regarded as important. In case he never gets to publish them in book-form, I asked him for permission to include something of them in this book, and was graciously given it. Thanks, Clyde, and your wife, Phoebe, too.]

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## FUNERAL CEREMONIES

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, a whole industry has existed around death and dying; it is really big business for priests, monks, undertakers, coffin-makers, cemetery-owners, florists, etc. So much expense is involved in it that many people cannot afford to die, and the gullibility of the ignorant and superstitious are exploited by those with vested interests in the industry. People are prepared to spend huge sums of money to have funeral-ceremonies performed according to what tradition has decreed to be 'the proper manner'. In this article, I want to examine the validity and rationale of funeral ceremonies, and whether it is possible to help the dead.

It is amazing how foolish superstitions are carried over, unquestioningly, from one generation to the next, never losing their grip on the minds of the ignorant. I have seen educated, wealthy and sophisticated people—some of them hard-headed businessmen—burning model houses, TV's, cars, palaces replete with furniture and servants, and so on—all made of paper and costing great sums of money—in the belief that somehow—beyond logical explanation—their dead relatives will receive them in proper form, wherever they might be. People can be highly educated and shrewd in certain ways, while in other ways they can also be naïve and foolish.

Some years ago, in Indonesia, I was told of a nun who, if requested to perform a funeral or memorial ceremony, would state her fee, saying: "If you want the full ceremony, three days and nights, it will cost .....; one day-and-night will cost ....." This is just exploiting people's sorrow and ignorance, and it is highly debatable whether the deceased person would benefit in any way from such blatant mummery. Surely, the ones who might best help the dead—if the dead can be helped at all—are those who were nearest and dearest to them in life, and

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with whom there was a strong bond of affection. The best way we might help, I feel, is not by spending huge sums of money on ceremonies and rituals that nobody understands (or, *if they understand, they do not explain the meaning of*), but by sitting quietly and composedly in a place where happy times have been spent with the deceased, and sending out positive thoughts of love and goodwill.

Objective and documented research done in the West in recent years into numerous cases of people being declared clinically dead—that is, without pulse, breathing or brain-waves—and then later reviving and recounting their experiences of 'life-after-death' or 'out-of-the-body', seems to point to the fact that life can, and does, go on after the death of the body. People of various cultural and religious backgrounds who have undergone 'out-of-the-body' experiences, when interviewed and questioned, report the same basic things; they say that the mind, consciousness, soul or spirit—whatever you like to call it—detaches itself from the body, in which all the signs of life have ceased, and seems to hover above it, aware, by sight and sound, of what is happening around it. But, although it can see and hear, it cannot be seen or heard. Later, after the body revives—by something other than just the attempts of others to resuscitate it—they can report what went on. If the death took place in a hospital, for example, they can tell about the efforts of hospital staff to revive the body, who said and did what; they can tell of the grieving relatives waiting outside, and so on, all of which can be verified. They also tell of a feeling of great peace at being released from the body, and of a meeting with a 'bright light', which some, because of their religious background, describe as a 'angel', and feel great love and warmth coming from it, so that all fear disappears. It is at this point that they 'know' or 'feel' that they have to return to their bodies and 'wake up', that it is not yet time to die. In some cases, there is a great reluctance to go back, particularly if the body has been

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shattered in an accident, or if it is pain-filled with cancer or another incurable disease. Back they come, however, but two results from their experience of death is that they are filled with a sense of the importance of living life as it comes, and, having known how easy it is to die—without terrible things happening to them on the other side—they are not afraid to die again.

All this does not constitute scientific proof of the existence or continuation of life-after-death, but it certainly should cause people to be more open to the possibility if not the probability of it, and never to dogmatically maintain that it cannot be.

Let us suppose—*just* suppose—life *does* go on after death, at least as far as in the cases referred to above: would it be possible to help the dead in any way, and how? Well, people who have experienced death and returned to tell of it, say they could see and hear what was going on in 'this world', while the living here could not see or hear them; it is a one-way thing.

Now, as part of the funeral ceremonies in cultures such as that of the Chinese, many offerings are made for the dead, like food, drink and so on, things which the dead, without material bodies, cannot partake of; the food remains just the same after the ceremony. Are these offerings then in vain? No, we cannot say that. If the mind, or spirit, of the deceased is near, and has not yet gone on its way, it would not be able to partake of the offerings being made in its name, of course; but it might take joy and consolation in the fact that offerings *were* being made for it by loving and devoted relatives and friends, and the arising of joy could, perhaps, help it to rise out of a miserable condition on that side and encourage it to go on. If the deceased person cannot be helped in such a way the offerings are still not in vain, if offered sincerely; the act of offering something with the intention to benefit others has a beneficial effect upon the minds of the ones who offer there and then. So, little is lost by making offerings in this way and much might be gained.

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Because of the possibility of the spirit of the deceased person still being near for some time after death—in limbo, as it were—the preaching of the Dharma is very important, and the ceremony should not be conducted without some Dharma being preached. Unfortunately, Dharma-preaching is often left out, and so the real purpose of the ceremony is neglected and discarded. Even if the consciousness of the deceased is no longer near but has already gone on, the Dharma should be preached to the living, so they may learn something useful for their own lives from this occasion of sorrow.

In some cases, people die so quickly and suddenly that they do not realize they *are* dead, and, thinking that they are still alive, are confused to find that no-one listens to them or sees them. How long they may continue in this state, no-one knows, but sometimes it is necessary for someone to inform them of their condition and urge them not to stay here, but to go on. This is why the Tibetans, when someone dies, carry the body outside and say something like: "You are dead now, so go away and don't come back again; we don't want you here anymore; you must continue with your journey". Thrown out? Yes, in a way, but not because of lack of love; it is in order to help the consciousness of the dead to break any temptation or desire to linger around the family, friends or familiar places, and speed it on to the next stage of its pilgrimage.

Once, in the Refugee Camp in the Philippines where I used to stay, I was approached by a family and requested to accompany them to their quarters. There, they told me that their younger sister had drowned in the nearby stream two weeks earlier, and said that they could feel her coming back every night, as the room would suddenly become very cold, and they were afraid. I advised them not to fear as their sister was probably coming back to ask them for consolation and reassurance, and when they felt her presence again, they should explain to her: "Sister, we love you very much, but you are not part of this



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world anymore so must not come here again; you must go on with your journey, just as we must go on with ours; and if we have enough affinity, we will meet again. Go on, go on!" The next time they felt her presence they followed my instructions and spoke to her in this manner, and after that, they never felt her coming again.

The phenomenon of haunted houses can be explained by the excessive attachment of some people to family, friends, places or possessions while they were alive. When they died, the attachment acted as a force to keep them 'stuck' near the people and things they were so fond of. It must be a miserable condition, seeing and hearing, trying to communicate, but not being seen or heard, and exorcism must often be employed to 'unstuck' the one who has become so stuck. However, this has become so shrouded in mystery and superstition that many people view it with suspicion, fear, or repugnance. But I have spoken about exorcism above in a simple down-to-earth manner, shorn of elements of magic and mumbo-jumbo.

As to burning houses and other things made of paper, well, the only people who benefit from that are those who make them. Where it all began, I do not know, but I once heard a little story of how, when the paper-industry of long-ago China was hit by a recession, the paper-merchants got together to discuss what to do. Someone finally came up with the bright idea of making model houses, palaces, people and things from paper and then mount an advertising campaign to sell the idea to the public that it is filial to burn such things for dead relatives, who would then get them in real form on 'the other side'. Slowly, they were able to foist this ridiculous idea off on a filial society (it's amazing just what people *will* believe!), and the paper-industry began to recover. These days, many people follow this custom not from filial piety but from conformity to tradition and out of fear of what others might say of them if they were not to do so. Traditions die hard.

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Help your own dead! Don't just call in others and pay them to do it, for they will have no close connection with your dead and might perform their ceremonies half-heartedly, anyway. All that needs to be done can be done by you yourself. Put aside the idea that monks and priests are specially appointed for this or are magicians who can do things you cannot. The duty of monks is to teach and transmit the Dharma, not to make mumbo-jumbo and cheat people. If the monk teaches at the funeral-ceremony he has done his duty, but if he does not, the ceremony is not valid, and the whole thing is just a matter of priestcraft. And if we allow things to go on in this way, without trying to halt or slow the decline, maybe soon, we must hold a funeral-ceremony for Buddhism itself! But what can be done? Well, for one thing, the monks should be requested and required to preach the Dharma and not allowed to get away with mere chanting and the performance of rituals that have lost any meanings they might have had to begin with.

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## **ONE THING ALWAYS LEADS TO ANOTHER**

"Last year, somewhere on the leaves of a forgotten sugar-cane plant, a bit of sunlight ended its eight-minute dash to earth. Somehow, the plant turned that sunlight into sugar. Somehow, that sugar got into my morning tea.

"I sipped last year's sunshine at breakfast. Now it feeds my muscles. It's dark now, and I start for home on my bicycle. The muscled sunlight becomes pedal-power, then chain-pull, wheel-spin, generator-whine, filament-heat, and finally—from the headlight—light again!"

Malcolm Wells: Environmental Action Bulletin.

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## HAS RELIGION FAILED?

**T**HE WORLD, AT PRESENT, has never been in a worse situation. Our greed is limitless and has brought us to the brink of extinction, where we totter, not knowing how long we can maintain our balance, or if we will plunge over the precipice.

Religion has the answers to our problems—even to this greatest of all problems: "To be or not to be". But why, when Religion has advocated sane living and provided guidelines for us to live by, is there no peace in the world? This question must be asked, and we must ask it honestly and fearlessly: *Has Religion Failed?*

And I answer: "No, it hasn't; it is we who have failed, by not applying Religion in our lives". It is amazing how many people think Religion is something to be remembered only on 'special' days like Christmas, *Wesak*, a wedding or a funeral, etc., and when these 'special' days are over, their religion goes back into the closet with their best clothes and stays there until the next 'special' day. Or they think Religion is only for people who stay in temples or monasteries, and have no idea that Religion is for them, too. Religion has therefore become something 'special' instead of something to live by.

But let me explain what I mean by Religion, because obviously, I am not using the term as is generally understood. I maintain that Religion is nothing special at all, but something ordinary, *very* ordinary, an everyday affair. But by 'ordinary', I don't mean useless or unimportant; on the contrary, I mean it in the sense that air and water are ordinary—that is: common, but vitally important; if we didn't have them, we would soon die. In the same way, Religion is important and ordinary in our daily lives; it is important because it is ordinary and ordinary because it is important. Unfortunately, many people consider

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Religion out-of-date, a thing only for old ladies holding rosaries. Nothing could be further from the truth. Religion is the Art of Living Well.

**We** depend upon others. Is there anyone who does not depend upon others? Is anyone independent? Even the richest and most-powerful depend upon others; in fact, such people are more dependent upon others than poorer people, for many of them would not even wash a cup themselves or clean their own shoes. This means we are related to others, connected to them by our contacts with them, by our dependence upon them. We therefore have many more relatives than we realize. And we need Religion in our relationships with them, so that we may live peacefully and happily together, being fair and kind to each other. Without Religion—that is, without *what is Right* or *Righteousness*—in our dealings with others, suspicion, fear, greed and hatred easily take root in our minds, and lead to deceit, cheating, exploitation, persecution, aggression, and war, for war begins in minds devoid of Religion; if there were Religion in our minds, there would be no war.

It's no use just sitting looking at your washing-machine or vacuum-cleaner waiting for it to work, as it will never work by itself; *you* have to work it! And the same is so with Religion: *you* have to work it! It's not just theory, doctrine or belief—the stuff of museums: old books, old stones, old bones—but must be a living experience. Nor is there anything superstitious, mysterious or magical about it.

**But** we begin in the wrong places; our heads are in the clouds, dreaming about Heaven, Enlightenment, Nirvana, etc. It's as if we want to build a house, and imagine we can begin with the roof with no thought for the foundations. How could it be built? We are concerned with flowers and fruit, not with seeds and roots. So it is no wonder we are confused and jump from one religion to another, imagining that a change of name makes any difference—well, it *does*, a *negative* difference: it

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makes people more silly, and takes them further away from the truth, from *real* Religion, which is within their own minds, and has been there from the very beginning, but they didn't see it. People imagine they are religious merely by calling themselves 'Buddhists' or 'Christians', 'this' or 'that', and by believing certain things. Religion is not a matter of belief but of how a person lives; nor does it need a name. If a person lives religiously he will see how superficial and unnecessary names are.

**We** do not see what is true Religion because of the conditioning we have undergone since birth—no, *before* that; we have been conditioned, in this life (and I'm not qualified to say anything about what might have been before, or might be after this present life, as I have no proof of that, but just personal opinions, which are of no use to anyone else in the search for truth), from the moment of conception and while we lay in our mother's womb. If we understand something of our conditioning, we will see that the question of free-will does not arise, for whose will can be free when he lives within the structure of his conditioning and acts accordingly?

The education we receive—or rather undergo—in school and university forms a big part of our conditioning. Are we aware of it? We've had facts and figures pumped into our minds by others, like gasoline into a car; we've been force-fed with information like chickens in a poultry-farm being fattened for the market; in other words, we've been brainwashed. But how much do we know by ourselves? You might understand all that's written here—that's not difficult—but do you know it, deep inside yourself, and can you live according to your knowledge? That is the test, that is what makes for living religiously, not merely going to the temple or church to kneel and pray and occasionally put something into the offering-box.

**Our** education-systems have spoiled us, twisted us, indoctrinated and convinced us that the information they feed us is the only valid education; that is why so much importance is

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attached to bits of papers known as degrees or diplomas; how we really are doesn't matter; the certificates are all-important. Have we not become paper-people thereby? Just because a person has gone through university and come away with a bundle of papers is not proof of intelligence, just as it is not proof of stupidity if a person has not been to university and has no certificates. The Buddha had no certificate as far as I've heard, but shall we consider him an uneducated lout because of that? We have our priorities wrong. If a Buddha appeared today some people would ask him for his 'bio-data' and want to know what degrees he held; if he had no Ph.D., some people would be shocked; "What!? No Ph.D.!? How can you be a Buddha without a Ph.D.!? Impossible!!"

Life has changed very quickly and become more complex than ever in the last few years, and we have become sophisticated (the dictionary-definition of that word is: "having learned the ways of the world, and having lost natural simplicity"; it is therefore nothing to be proud of); we have been educated almost to the point of extinction; we've been taught *what* to think but not *how* to think. But are we happy because of it? The state of society clearly shows we are not. Yes, it makes us *specialized*, but in doing so, it also makes us narrow. Yes, it makes us *efficient*, but often also ruthless in our efficiency. We have lost our sensitivity; it was never encouraged or nurtured; we have become like robots, functioning according to what we've been taught, not by what we've learned. We've been taught to be *successful*, to be *Number One*, to be *Somebody*, and these things remain our goals in life, and we'll allow nothing to stand in our way of achieving them. If achieved, we have something to maintain and protect, so the fear and the conflict and the struggle continue, without end. But are we happy? How can we be? In fact, we are more miserable, though we try to disguise this in various ways, try to smother our discontent in the pursuit of pleasure and material gain, pretending to be happy. We have fixed ideas about happiness, have been conditioned to

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think that happiness means being successful in society's eyes, being Number One, having all the nice consumer-goods that the big manufacturers and governments want us to buy. No, happiness does not come from these things; in fact, looking for happiness in such ways only makes us more *unhappy*. And there is no end to the terrible things that people will do in order to find happiness.

Many of us have no Religion in our lives at all; by that, I do not mean 'brand-name religion' like 'Buddhism' or 'Christianity', because such names are usually just empty shells without inner substance, substitutes for the *real* Religion, which means living righteously and caring about others, not just thinking of ourselves.

Because our minds are full of stuff that others have told or taught us, we do not see the simple things around us, the beauty and wonder that is never far away, and which we so desperately need to see, because if we do not see lovely things—things lovely by nature as well as lovely things we've made—we feel lost and separated from the totality of life. Something—a *great* something—is missing, and there is no substitute for it at all, even though we search frantically for one. We must get back to an appreciation of the simple but profound joys of and in the life around us—to watch, with wonder, a spider industriously spinning its intricate web, birds building their nests, the splendid forms and colors of insects, each completely functional in its tiny parts; to feel the hidden strength of nature breaking open a seed to put down roots and send up shoots in the first stage of becoming a mighty tree; to taste sweet fruits, which come attractively packaged in so many varieties, etc., and all without feeling a need to explain everything with our puny theories, or attribute it all to a supernatural agency. How nice to put aside academic knowledge for a while, to stand back and wonder at the miracles of life all around us, and to know that we are part of it all. This is true

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knowledge—knowledge of Unity, of being related to everything that is. And from this knowledge comes Religion; we begin to live Religiously, taking care not to hurt anything if possible, not to destroy anything needlessly, to live with Love, with an almost-breathless sense of Awe.

If we were not so sophisticated and proud of the knowledge we have been fed by others, we would not be ashamed to bend our heads and be more in contact with the Good Earth which supports us and our fellow-beings so uncomplainingly. We would share things with each other in holy communion, and point out the beauties of life to others so they may enjoy them, too. Heaven is here if we want it; Enlightenment is within us all; all we need do is to manifest it, to live in an enlightened way; and the more we do this—the more we open our hearts to and for others—the more enlightened we shall become. What mystery is there in this?

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“Most of the good things that have happened to people throughout history are due to the good works of other people.

Thanking God for the good deeds of people is wholly unfair and inconsiderate. On the other hand, holding God responsible for tornadoes, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, floods and other ‘Acts of God’ is ignorant and nonsensical.”

(Clyde Davis).

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## QUANTUM LEAP

EUROPEANS, “UNTIL ABOUT 500 YEARS AGO, had nothing but myths, untested speculations, and other products of imagination, which amounted to ignorance, with which to answer many human questions about life, birth and death, sickness, disease, weather, seasons, and how best to survive all sorts of dangers and hazards.

“For the past 500 years we have been perfecting the Scientific Method which is the first and only reliable method we have ever found for finding answers to questions about the natural, physical universe, and for being certain that we really know what we think we know. Perhaps it should surprise no-one that when scientifically-collected knowledge and understanding of some of the measurable aspects of nature were first announced, vigorous rejection and condemnation was immediately voiced by the entire Christian community because the findings, derived from direct observation, differed greatly from what the religion had taught as religious ‘truth’” (Clyde Davis).

Let me ask a pointed question: From which have you benefited more: Religion, or Science? There’s no need to answer, is there? Science has brought us immeasurable benefits in the past 5 centuries, and enhanced our lives tremendously, but only in the face of great opposition from the established religion of Europe, which opposed change and progress every inch of the way. To survive as a viable force into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and stand on its own feet, without the traditional use of fear

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and ignorance to maintain itself, it must change and adapt to the reality of the times. It must be based upon reality, not upon exposed myths and tired fairy-tales. Nor must it use Science as a *trojan-horse* to perpetuate itself. Not long ago, I came across an example of such trojan-horse subterfuge. It begins fairly well, but soon makes a *quantum leap* from what Science has revealed to the realm of fancy. It was a little pamphlet entitled: **"Why am I here? Where am I going?"** by an Evangelist named Robert E. Surgenor; I will quote it in full:

**"Have you ever considered the greatness of the universe? The more you examine the scientific findings, the more befogged your mind will become! Astronomers tell us that the Milky Way galaxy, which includes our earth, contains some 100 billion stars. Only 5,776 are visible to the naked eye. Traveling at the speed of light (over 186,282 miles per second), it would take over 4 years to reach the nearest star and about 75,000 years to reach the most distant star in our galaxy. To travel across the Milky Way at the speed of light (700 million mph) would take 100,000 years! Astronomers also claim that there are almost one trillion other galaxies detected in the universe! Traveling at 700 million mph, it would take you 8 billion years to reach the most distant galaxy ever seen! This tremendous galaxy is 10 times larger than our own Milky Way! These numbers make us feel rather small, don't they? Is it any wonder the psalmist said, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psalm 19:1). Yet, God "tells the number of the stars; He calls them all by their names"**

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(Psalm 147:4). In contrast, man (with all his scientific equipment) has to confess, "the host of heaven cannot be numbered" (Jeremiah 33:22). God sees more with his naked eye than man ever can through his 80-million-dollar telescopes!

### **PLANET EARTH**

Another amazing thing is that, out of all the vast universe, there is only one planet that God has chosen to be inhabited. "For thus says the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it; He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). Having a diameter of 7,926 miles, a circumference of 24,901 miles, and a surface-area of 196,937,600 square miles (of which 28% is land), this earth houses over 5 billion humans. Suspended in space, it rotates on its own axis at 1,000 miles per hour; at the same time, it travels through empty space at the rate of 20,936,400,000 miles yearly! Its highest point is Mt. Everest, 29,028 feet above sea-level, and its lowest point the Mariana Trench, 35,760 feet below the waves of the Pacific Ocean. Yet in spite of its greatness, the earth is not so big after all. You could put 1,300,000 earths inside the sun, 64 million suns inside the star Antares, and several hundred million Antares inside Epsilon!

So here we are, orbiting through the vastness of space on our temporary abode called 'Earth'. Every hour, 17,150 souls are born to take up residence here, while 6,850 bid good-bye forever to earth's surface, to take up residence elsewhere. Consequently, every day Mother Earth has an increase in pop-

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ulation of 247,200 souls. Now just what is the reason for all of this movement? Have you ever asked yourself: **Why am I here?** What is the purpose of it all? **Where am I going?** These questions are good thoughts to consider, don't you agree? To answer such questions, the only reliable source is the Holy Scriptures. Herein are the Creator's answers to a bewildered and wondering human-race.

### **WHERE AM I GOING?**

God's original plan for man was that he glorify God and serve Him forever. However, man ruined himself and his lofty position before God through sin. Sad indeed, "by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Consequently, the human race, instead of being able to glorify God, is alienated from God, spiritually "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Consequently, mankind is doomed to "hell fire" (Mark 9:43-48), "everlasting punishment" (Matthew 26:46), and torment for ever and ever in "the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 14:11; 21:8), "where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44). These Scriptures answer the question, "**Where am I going?**" as far as God is concerned, don't they?

### **WHY AM I HERE?**

But wait! Please read on and find God's answer to "**Why am I here?**" Even though the devil would like to have you in

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hell, God desires that you be in heaven with Him when you leave this old planet earth. When we consider the magnitude of God's greatness, what grace it is on His part that He ever considers us at all! David exclaimed: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Hebrews 2:9). Because of sin, we no longer see all things as when God originally created man; "but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). On this earth, the Lord Jesus "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." At Calvary, He "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Hebrews 9:26; 10:12). Every soul that accepts the Lord Jesus as the only sacrifice for his sins immediately comes into the good of that sacrifice, and is saved from hell and fitted for heaven. God proclaims, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17). **Why am I here?** You are here for a short lifetime that you might take the opportunity to obtain God's wonderful salvation. Then you will be able to glorify Him and serve Him, not only on earth, but in heaven throughout eternity. That's God' desire! Are you willing?"

Do you see the quantum-leap made in the above tract, the point where the writer departs from science into fancy? The evangelist certainly has a hypothesis, but it is not a theory, as it is based upon belief and wishful thinking, and is not supported by reality. In contrast, I would like to reproduce here another tract by Clyde Davis, entitled:

## ESSAY ON THEORIES

**M**ANY INTELLECTUALS decry the alleged advances made during the past several hundred years in our understanding of nature and natural phenomena. Science and scientists are criticized for erecting a structure of reality that is at best merely an embodiment of current prejudices and currently fashionable opinions, and that in future a whole new structure may become fashionable. Science is thus dismissed as no more than an aggregation of theories that may someday be replaced by new theories.

Every science does indeed consist of theories, but the word THEORY has quite a different meaning within science than outside. A scientific THEORY is a statement of what is *established beyond reasonable doubt* [italics Beachcomber's], is accepted as a statement of fact by knowledgeable workers in the field, and can no longer be seriously challenged. This is true, for example, of the Atomic Theory, the Theory of Electricity, the Quantum Theory, the Tectonic Plate Theory, the Theory of Evolution, etc. Research work in all fields of science will nevertheless continue because many areas remain that need further study. Thus the detailed process by which a new species evolves remains to be observed. And the bridge between Newtonian and Quantum Mechanics is not yet built.

A THEORY is reached by starting with a collection of hypotheses or best guesses and amassing evidence through ex-

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periment and other data-gathering that gradually eliminates all hypotheses but one, or combines or modifies hypotheses until a THEORY begins to take shape.

**A THEORY** must not only account for all phenomena observed in the area of interest, but must correctly predict phenomena not yet observed. Moreover, it must be consistent with all other THEORIES and all other knowledge that is known about the physical universe.

Long before the discovery of the scientific method there was great curiosity about the nature and causes of natural phenomena. Every one was free to offer conjectures and guesses about almost anything so that a primitive kind of folk-science developed in many places. My grandfather, for example, once told me that water in a stream becomes safely drinkable after it has flowed across 4 stones. A farmer I once worked for believed that shrubs and bushes cut from a fence-line or pasture on August 2 would not grow again from the roots.

The conjectures and guesses that gained wide credibility were those offered by wise men, or men who gained reputation as thinkers and seers. Among such men were Abraham, Moses, Plato, Aristotle, the Buddha, Jesus, Lao Tse, et al., all of whom were noted chiefly for their hypotheses about human behavior, but whose views on any subject merited close attention. If several seers promulgated different hypotheses about anything there was no way to decide which seer was correct (we must avoid saying which one was TRUE because TRUTH

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itself is believed by some of the anti-science folk to have no reality, that TRUTH has about the same life-expectancy as a THEORY).

The scientific method has made it possible to find out which hypothesis, if any, deserves to be called a THEORY, or might be the basis of a THEORY or at least might justify the additional work needed to establish a THEORY. Human behavior is of course the most interesting and also the most difficult one about which to guess accurately.

Inanimate nature has been the easiest to study and is now blanketed with THEORIES. But much remains to be learned. The most serious impediment to further advances may be our limited sources of information. Initially, we were limited to the information that our senses could gather. We greatly increased this with telescopes and microscopes and mathematics and have since moved far into the vast electromagnetic domain of information. There may be other kinds of information about the physical universe of which our senses and devices are unaware.

Unfortunately, the scientific method to date is applicable only to reproducible phenomena that can be weighed or measured or quantified in some fashion; it is unlikely that the method can ever be applied to purely mental concepts such as are encountered in all religions and some philosophies. And even if a scientific study of a religious concept such as reincarnation could be imagined it is doubtful if anyone with the temerity to



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undertake such a study could be found. The same is true of most other religious hypotheses.

**A THEORY** developed by the scientific method is a really remarkable and glorious achievement among contentious humans because it is accepted among scientists throughout the world; the same **THEORY** is held by all scientists in every country and every language. Unlike religions and philosophies which are still at the stage of hypotheses and best guesses, scientific **THEORIES** enjoy a universal acceptance with a high level of confidence.

**Science** can be viewed as the first and only human accomplishment that justifies the evolution of the remarkable human brain."

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## WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

**T**HE FOLLOWING CAME TO ME RECENTLY from a friend in Malaysia:

[ This is a story I read in the Chinese papers Lian He Zao Bao\* on 2 Aug 1999. It is written by local Chinese traveller-cum writer, Wu Wei Cai.\* I felt very touched and shaken by the story and I have translated it to English so that more people may read about it...

“This happened on a highway in China. 40 passengers, mostly males, were on an inter-state bus. Halfway through the journey, two thugs on the bus suddenly went up to the woman bus-driver and demanded she stop the bus and follow them to some waste-ground nearby. The woman refused and began to resist them. At the same time, she cried out to the other passengers for help. However, they not only cruelly turned a deaf ear to her cries, but even suggested she give in to the thugs' demands so that they could carry on their journey quickly when they had done with her. One young man stood up to chide the rest of the passengers and tried to help the woman.

However, sensing that the majority of the people did not have the guts to resist them, the thugs grew even bolder and beat the young man up. They then forcefully dragged the woman out of the bus. Right on the side of the road, the two thugs took turns to rape her while the rest watched.

After they had satisfied their lust, they commanded the woman to return to the bus and resume the journey. With tears streaming down her face, the woman begged that they turn the righteous young man out of the bus as she was too ashamed to face him again. The young man felt absolutely stupefied. So much for trying to speak up for the woman! He was now thrown out and left stranded in desolate countryside!

## WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE? }

Hours later, when the driver reached a stretch of road bordered by a precipitous drop, she sped up and turned the bus over the cliff, right to the bottom of the ravine.

This story was told later by the only survivor of the journey—the righteous young man driven out of the bus."

Recently, there has been a spate of events that reveal the ugly side of our "civilized" society. Not long ago, a Malaysian bus-driver was viciously beaten up when he tried to stop a snatch-thief. He was surrounded by members of the public, watching with their arms folded. Another time, a baby was found in a trash-can, nearly crushed to death by durian-husks.

I question myself: Have we gone from the Stone Age to become even more barbarous? Has the human heart degenerated to being no different from that of an animal? Did the woman bus-driver commit suicide because she couldn't bear the shame of being raped, or is it because she had given up on the humanity of "humans"?

If this article has caused you to pause and check the condition of your heart, you may wish to pass it on to someone else to read.

=====

\*Lian He Zao Bao is a Chinese newspaper of Singapore. \*Wu Wei Cai is a Singaporean traveller-writer studying film-making in China. Some of his articles appear in the local Chinese papers as well. Although I have no means to verify the incident, it certainly could have happened. It reminds me of the Hollywood movie which won Jodie Foster her first Oscar, "The Accused" .

**When we think that we are being 'neutral', 'non-partisan',**

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'apolitical' when something obviously wrong is going on, are we not as guilty as those apathetic on-lookers?

**Silence** does not always mean 'neutrality'. Sometimes, it is tacit consent for the predators to carry on their cruelty to the victims. ]

Thanks, Friend, for this account and your feelings.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ENLIGHTENMENT IS NEAR

IN MARCH, 1998, I sat beneath the tree that for thousands of years people have called 'the Bodhi-Tree' in the Holy-of-holies of Buddhism in India, a place known as Budh-Gaya (it is not the original tree, but a descendent of it). Constantly, people circumambulate the main shrine, drawn here from all over the world, their various garbs identifying them as Japanese, Thai, Burmese, Chinese, Tibetan, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, and so on; not a few Westerners can be seen, too. Many tongues—some recognizable to me, others not—are heard here.

Since my first visit in 1974, I have been here many times, and the scene, while always new, of course, is always one of devotion. People have been coming here as pilgrims since the time that Siddhartha Gotama, otherwise known as *Sakyamuni*, discovered what he did here over 2,500 years ago and became thereafter known as '*The Buddha*': 'The Awakened One'.

There have been many changes at Budh-Gaya since my first visit, and not all of them for the better. It has become more accessible these days, and consequently commercialized, as more people visit now, with more money than they used to have; there are more temples, and many hotels and shops where before there were only few, and, needless to say, the number of beggars has increased; because of incidents of banditry and armed-robbery in the area, it is unsafe to travel some of the roads at night (even temples have been robbed at gun-point). But, while the creature-comforts of visitors is quite well-provided for, it is rather surprising to find not a single vegetarian restaurant in this holy-of-holy places of Buddhism! This region is populated by Hindus and Muslims; there are no Buddhists; even so, years ago, there were no butcher-shops here, and if people wanted meat, they had to go to neighboring towns to buy it, but now that has changed, too. Demand has obviously created the supply, and quality has given way to

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quantity. I have no desire to go there again, preferring to visit lesser-known Buddhist places, of which there is no shortage in India—places where one can be quiet and undisturbed.

The devotion of pilgrims has taken many forms and varied in intensity; donations have been lavished on the place in hope of ‘making merit’, and, as always happens, with so much money coming in, some people have been drawn to the place for other than spiritual reasons.

Years ago, simple lodging in the various temples could be had without a set fee, but most people would donate at least what they would pay for a cheap hotel, and some much more. Now, however, most temples tell you: “This room costs that much; that one costs this much”. Well, we know that temples need money; they can’t be run on nothing, but to make a business of it is rather off-putting, to say the least. And last year, when I sought accommodation in one of the large Japanese temples where I had stayed before, I was informed: “Sorry, it’s for Japanese people only.” “But what about the sign over your gate that says ‘International Buddhist Brotherhood?’” said I. “Oh, that is just a name”, I was told. Too right; it was just a name, confirming what I always say about the hollowness of names and how we must look deeper, to find what, if anything, lies behind. Racism dies hard.

Near the opulent Thai Buddhist temple in Budh-Gaya are the foundations of an Indian Buddhist temple; they have been there for many years, but never got any further, because, my informant said, no sooner was money raised to continue the construction, than one of the monks absconded with the funds. Indian monks have such a reputation, that none of the temples there will allow them to stay. And this is India, the land where it all began! But I have seen it myself; it’s not just hearsay. At Kusinara, the place where the Buddha breathed his last, I observed a *gang*—for want of a better word—of Indian monks hanging around the main shrine, waiting for busloads of foreign

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visitors. As soon as any come, these 'monks' hurry into the shrine and sit cross-legged to create the impression they are meditating, with the hope that when the visitors enter and see them, they will give them money; obviously, their ruse works often enough, as I was told they'd been there for quite a while.

Unlike in former times, it is not hard to get to the Buddhist places, but still entails some discomfort and requires patience; India's infrastructure is aeons behind the West's, and it usually takes visitors a few days to adjust to the different conditions. Most visitors realize they cannot expect to live there as they do in their own lands, but it's not for long, so they gladly compromise. They come in comfort from afar, by plane, then switch to travel by train, bus or car, not as pilgrims did in former times, on foot or by horse (not to mention how some Tibetans—before Tibet was brutally occupied—made the entire journey, both ways, by taking three steps then making a full-length prostration on the road, over snow-covered mountain-passes, down to the sweltering plains of India until they reached their treasured destination: the Diamond Throne of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

It is a word of great importance in Buddhism—indeed, we may say that it is what Buddhism is all about: *Enlightenment*. But what is it? Do we, like people of other religions with their word 'God', got only the word—which, in itself, is useless and maybe worse—or have we, by our own experience, something of what the word represents or symbolizes?

We speak freely of 'the Buddha's Enlightenment beneath the Bodhi-Tree', as if doing so implies an automatic understanding of what took place in the mind of Siddhartha Gotama at that time. But it is not enough to merely repeat, like parrots, what we have heard or read, or recite ancient formulas. We must *know*.

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Let us examine the word, 'enlightenment'. It has to do with light, obviously. But what *kind* of light? Not sunlight, of course, or lamplight. It refers to the 'light' of understanding as opposed to the 'darkness' of ignorance, and hence is something of the mind. We may use the analogy of turning on the light at night to convey an idea of what happens: upon turning on the light, we perceive things clearly, whereas before, in the darkness, we could not. Things were there, in the darkness, but because of lack of light, we couldn't see them. Enlightenment, like this, means seeing—or understanding—clearly what is here.

But what does 'understanding things clearly' mean? It means, not taking things at face-value, as they appear, but 'seeing' their insubstantial nature, how they came into being from various causes, how, likewise, they change and cease to be, and how, each and everything is like a facet of a diamond, not existing on its own, but 'real' only as part of the whole. This is very complex, of course, and cannot be observed intellectually or academically, but must be realized on a much deeper level, intuitively and feelingly, with no space or distinction between the observer and the observed. The observer is considered as not different from the observed, for they are both of the same nature and subject to change, arising and passing away. We may observe a flower, for example, and all the processes therein, while a flower has not the capacity to observe us, but we can see that what governs a flower's existence—how it comes into being, not by accident, but from many co-operating factors—also governs us; we recognize cause-and-effect at work in both the observer and the observed, and realize that there is really no barrier or separation between them except in the mind.

Without being enlightened ourselves, we merely speak of the Buddha's Enlightenment, and, in this, how are we different from people of other religions who speak of God, Heaven, Hell, etc.? It is all a matter of hearsay, and makes no sense at all.



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How do we *know* of ‘the Buddha’s Enlightenment’ in the first place? This event, if it happened, took place over 2,500 years ago; moreover, there was no-one around to observe or record it, and even if there had been, how could he have observed, measured and understood what was going on in Gotama’s mind? Not to say it didn’t happen, or that Gotama was putting us on, but we have only his word for what happened; it’s not something that we ourselves have experienced and verified, is it? Did he really say what the books—which were not written until 500 years later—report him as saying? Who did he tell, and how did he tell it? And how did that person or persons retell it? We cannot be sure, can we? There is room for doubt or uncertainty here, rather than unquestioning acceptance or belief of what the books say. Followers and believers have a tendency to exaggerate things in order to glorify their teachers; it was no different then than it is now.

It is said, in the Buddhist scriptures, that Gotama achieved *Sambodhi*, (translated as *Full Enlightenment*) and became *omniscient* (*all-knowing*). And because it is so written, many Buddhists implicitly believe it and state it in speech and writing as if it is therefore indisputably true. But really, to claim that the Buddha knew everything (or that God knows everything)—as many people do—has no meaning, and is just empty, because to make such a claim requires that the person making it knows everything himself, and since no-one knows everything, it cannot be said that the Buddha (or ‘God’ or anyone else) knows everything. We would have to ask: “How do you *know* the Buddha was omniscient and knew everything?” We dare not, as Buddhists, say: “Because the scriptures say so”, as it would make us appear silly. We are merely going upon assumption, and this is not very wise, and doesn’t accord with the Buddha’s exhortations not to believe him, but to test his teachings as a goldsmith would test gold, and find out for ourselves.

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People who have been to Nepal will know that the capital, Kathmandu, nestles in a valley in the foothills of the Himalayas. At certain seasons, in the early morning, before the clouds rise to obscure them, the peaks of the Himalayas can be glimpsed in the distance. To view the sun rising over the Himalayas, many people go to *Nagarkot*, an 11,000-foot *hill* on the rim of Kathmandu valley, and there, far away, they can see Mount Everest. It rises 29,028 feet above sea level, and as such, is the highest mountain on earth, but from Nagarkot, it doesn't seem so; in fact, other peaks appear higher.

If we know of nothing higher than what we've experienced, we would regard that as the *highest*. But progress or civilization is a matter of pushing back barriers and horizons. Europeans of the Middle Ages lived in a very small world, created and bounded by ignorance; they thought that what they knew was all there was to be known; such is the nature of ignorance. Columbus is credited with discovered America, but although he deserves credit for boldly doing what he did, it is not for discovering America; rather, it is for discovering or exposing European ignorance of America; there were millions of people there already; America had been inhabited for thousands of years; Columbus pushed back the barriers and enlarged European knowledge of the world.

Everest has been scaled and measured, and there are people who *know* that it's the highest mountain in the world; moreover, it can be demonstrated; the rest of us just have to take their word for it; it's not necessary for everyone to climb it. To most people, the 11,000 foot *hill* of Nagarkot would be high. Everest is not something of their experience, so they can talk only of hills and not of mountains. Set out on a trek towards Everest—a trek that would take several weeks—and higher and higher mountains would come into view, each one appearing the highest. Skirting them, however, one might be confronted with a still-higher mountain. And so it goes on.

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Likewise, there are mountains of the mind to encounter and scale, and each one, as we come to it, may appear the highest. Looking back on those we've climbed, and forward to those we face, however, we realize that there are always higher mountains ahead. Is there any end to it, any point where we might say, "This is it; this is *Full* or *Complete* Enlightenment? May there not be more ahead?"

In the Aero-Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., there is a display-case containing millions of transistors, like those used in earlier transistor-radios. Such a caseful of transistors was required to run a computer in the 1950's, but that work can now be done by a single micro-chip, and has made computers so widely available that even I have one. We've come a long way.

**We** may speak of 'enlightenment', as we can see there are various degrees of enlightenment or understanding, like the degrees on a thermometer, and we can safely say that we are all somewhat enlightened, but we are not qualified to speak of *Full* Enlightenment, cannot quantify it. Enlightenment, at our stage, is relative, a matter of more-or-less. Certainly, as most people would agree, we may become *more* enlightened, and that should be our concern; we have the potential for it, and may even call it our 'birthright', because the potential for it has been created by all the generations before us, gradually evolving from what people were like early on to what we have become; we are here now like this because they were there then like that, not as a result of our own efforts; we have a responsibility to use what they bequeathed us, to use it wisely, develop it, and pass it on with interest to those who come after. This is good enough reason—if we require a reason—for following the Way, and becoming more enlightened; we shouldn't waste or squander what is ours only on trust. Looking at it like this opens things out; the mind expands to take in much more

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than just this tiny fragment of life that we call 'I'. It is not just for ourselves that we live.

Reading the life-story of the Buddha (a Sanskrit word that was part of the Indian vocabulary long before the birth of Siddhartha, just as the Hebrew word 'Messiah' was known before the birth of Jesus), we see how Prince Siddhartha had many enlightenment-experiences before his Enlightenment of Buddhahood, and I will here recount two of them in order to show that Enlightenment can spring from observation of things quite common in the world around us.

When the Prince was still a boy, around six or seven years old, he was taken to observe the Spring Ploughing Festival, a ceremonial ploughing of the earth to mark the beginning of a new agri-year. Being basically an agrarian society, the people had close contact with the earth and deemed such a ceremony of great importance. No doubt offerings of various kinds were made to the gods and numerous nature-spirits that the people felt were all around them, needing to be propitiated and beseeched for help and blessings.

While the King went off to lead the ceremony with the Royal Plough, the young Prince was left in the care of some attendants at one side of the field. As the ceremony got underway with music and song, however, the attendants felt the desire to observe things a little closer, so left the Prince alone, thinking he would be alright for a short time by himself.

Somewhat removed from the sounds of gaiety, the Prince felt calm and peaceful; he saw around him the signs of prosperity,

"But, looking deep, he saw  
The thorns which grow upon this rose of life:  
How the swart peasant sweated for his wage,  
Toiling for leave to live; and how he urged  
The great-eyed oxen through the flaming hours,

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Goading their velvet flanks; then marked he, too,  
How lizard fed on ant, and snake on him,  
And kite on both; and how the fish-hawk robbed  
The fish-tiger of that which it had seized;  
.....till everywhere  
Each slew a slayer and in turn was slain,  
Life living upon death. So the fair show  
Veiled one vast, savage, grim conspiracy  
Of mutual murder, from the worm to man,  
Who himself kills his fellow".

Deeply impressed by these things, the Prince sat beneath  
a tree

" .....and first began  
To meditate this deep disease of life,  
What its far source, and whence its remedy.  
So vast a pity filled him, such wide love  
For living things, such passion to heal pain,  
That by their stress his princely spirit passed  
To ecstasy, and, purged from mortal taint  
Of sense and self, the boy attained thereat  
*Dhyana*, first step of the Path".

More than twenty years after this Ploughing Festival, while still living in the palace, the Prince felt a strong desire to view the city and the people therein. The books say that, until then, he had been confined within the palace-walls like a prisoner, on the orders of his father, so as to shield his pensive son from the painful realities of life, such as sickness, old age and death; he was provided with every conceivable luxury and pleasure in the palace in the hope that the destiny that had been foretold for him just after his birth—that he would leave the palace and go off in search of truth and become a Buddha—would not come to fruition, and that the alternative prediction—that he would become a great emperor—would take place. Finally, the King agreed to his request, but only after giving strict instruc-

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tions that the town was to be specially prepared, that the people should dress in their best clothes and appear happy, and that all signs of sickness, old age and death should be kept out of sight until the Prince had passed by.

When all was ready, the Prince was allowed to go out in his chariot. He was pleased with what he first saw, as his people looked prosperous and genuinely happy to see their handsome Prince. But then the unexpected happened: Suddenly, in front of the chariot, a bent and wasted figure staggered, supported by a staff. Shocked at this sight which was so out of place among the signs of happiness and well-being, the Prince told his charioteer to stop and asked him what this apparition was. The charioteer, Channa, replied that it was an old man, but the Prince could not understand, and asked: "Are there others like this, or is this the only one?" (We would consider this a very naïve question, but it is quite in keeping with the story, which says the Prince had never been allowed to see such things before, so his question was valid). Channa replied: "This is not uncommon, my Prince; if people live long enough, they all reach the condition of old age".

Bewildered, the Prince ordered Channa to drive on, but they hadn't gone far when the Prince saw another startling sight: a sick person lying at the roadside, writhing and moaning in pain. Immediately, he told Channa to halt and asked him about this. "Oh, he's sick", said Channa, "it's nothing unusual". "Nothing unusual?" echoed the Prince; "but I've never seen anything like it before! Could I become like that? And my wife, too?" "Yes", said Channa, "both you, your wife, and everyone else can become like that, if health fails".

More confused, and still not comprehending the commonality of such conditions, the Prince told Channa to go on again. Passing the happy, smiling people, the Prince's inner turmoil was not assuaged thereby, and it was as if he didn't see them. Then, around a bend, they were confronted by a third strange

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sight: a funeral-procession crossing their path, with a corpse borne on a bier followed by mourning people. Again, he told Channa to stop and asked him to explain. Channa told him they were carrying a body—a relative or friend, perhaps—to be cremated at the *burning-ghats*. The Prince then asked if this was something to be faced by a few only, or if we all come to this, and Channa told him that all people—no, all *things* that are born—must die, sooner or later; some die when they are young, he said, some in the prime of life, and some when they are old; but all die. Siddhartha asked himself: "Then what is the use of our living, of all our efforts, if we must come to this? Is this really all there is to life, or is there something more?"

"I've seen enough, Channa; go back now", he said. Channa turned the chariot, but before they reached the palace, the Prince saw a fourth momentous sight: a yogi, or ascetic, sitting cross-legged in meditation beneath a tree near the road. "A moment, Channa", he said, "Who might that be, and what is he doing? His clothes are poor and simple, but never have I seen such a peaceful expression on anyone's face before!" "That is a *sadhu*, Lord", said Channa, "an ascetic or holy-man—someone who has left his home and family to devote himself to the search for spiritual truth; he lives a life of simplicity and solitude as a way of attaining his goal".

**W**hen Siddhartha heard this, he immediately knew that this is what he himself must do at the first opportunity: must leave his palace in order to go off to search for Truth; the palace-life, he saw, was not conducive to the finding of peace and Truth, filled as it was with distracting pleasures and shallow things of the senses, things which tend to bind the spirit, hold it down and prevent it rising to greater heights.

**A**ccordingly, this is what happened. At the first opportunity—the legend says it was the very same night after he had seen the Four Sights—when everyone was sleeping, he silently left

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the palace, mounted his horse, Kanthaka, and accompanied by the loyal Channa, rode swiftly to the borders of the kingdom. There, he crossed the Anoma River, removed his jewels, cut off his long hair and beard and gave these things to Channa, together with the horse, telling him to take them back to the King and say that he would not return until he had found the cause of all the suffering in the world. Broken-hearted to be separated from his beloved Prince, Channa reluctantly obeyed, and Siddhartha set off alone into the forest as a homeless wanderer in search of Truth. He had not gone far when he met a beggar and exchanged his fine clothes for his dirty rags.

It is told that, after subjecting himself to various forms of mortification—even to the point of death—six long years later he finally became Enlightened and Liberated, and was thereafter known as 'The Buddha.' His search lasted for more than just six years, however; in fact, it cannot be said where it began, but throughout his life, from earliest years, we can observe what was happening and how all events were part of his preparation for Enlightenment; it didn't happen all at once, but as the result of many lifetimes of effort that bore fruit beneath the Bodhi-tree in Gaya more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus (the exact date cannot be ascertained, any more than can the birth of Jesus).

Personally, I am somewhat skeptical about the account of Prince Siddhartha being so cut off from the unpleasant side of life that when he saw the Four Sights, it was for the first time in his 29 years. I think it more probable that, like you and I, he had seen such things before, but on this particular occasion, his mind was so finely-tuned and sensitive, that he saw them as he had never seen them before, as *if* for the very first time, shocking him to the core of his being.

**We** have grown up with sickness, old-age and death all around us, and have accepted them without too many questions, so have become inured to them and are no longer



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shocked thereby, if we ever were. This doesn't mean that we understand it all, or have gone beyond the condition of old-age, sickness and death; they are still grim and painful realities that we are all subject to. But, although we grow old (if we are lucky and our lives don't come to an early end), get sick and die, all is not bleak and negative, for through it all Enlightenment may be found, by understanding deeply these very things; we have ample material to work with.

### **Seize the Moment!**

\* \* \* \* \*

"If you feel separate, alone, alienated by the devastation over your loss, take instruction from the Buddha. Go to your friends and neighbors to collect that mustard-seed from someone who has not been touched by grief. You will discover, like Kisa Gotami, that your own unique and personal pain is written on the heart of every other human being."

*Grief and the Path to Awakening,*  
By Mark Marion.

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## **TO LOVE SOMEONE**

To love someone

is to experience every other emotion outside of love and still come back to love.

To love someone

is to feel hurt or pain and be able to overcome it and forget about it.

To love someone

is to realize that the other person is not perfect. It is being able to see their bad parts, but put emphasis on the parts you love, and gladly accept them for the individual he/she is.

To love someone

is to lay a strong base for your feelings, but leave room for some fluctuation, because to feel exactly the same way all the time would leave no room for growth, experience and learning.

To love someone

is to be strong at accepting new ideas and facts. It is knowing that a person will not stay the same, but also that change happens gradually.

To love someone

is to give until your heart aches. The greatest gifts shared between two people are trust and understanding, which come from love. Love is giving one-hundred-and-ten-percent of yourself and only wanting something as simple as a smile in return.

To love someone

is to be able to see not only with your eyes but with your heart. It is to develop insight into your feelings and the other person's feelings, and to have a good understanding of your relationship.

To love someone

is to give of yourself totally, saying, "Here I am, and all that I am loves you very much." It is not twisting and turning and changing yourself to gain approval, but it is improving yourself so that your good points catch the other's attention and overshadow your faults.

*Anonymous.*

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## MILESTONES

**I**F WE LOOK BACK ON THE WAY by which we came to the present, we see that the path was far from straight and predictable, but twisted and turned. Sometimes climbing, sometimes descending, at other times seeming to come to a dead end, it often ran into obstacles, suffering, pain, but occasionally brought us to happiness and joy. Through everything, however, we arrived HERE. Was not your journey—like mine—a wonderful adventure? However did we manage it?

No doubt, in your life—as in mine—there were many milestones or events we regard as significant and leading to other things. One of mine took place in 1966, when I picked up a discarded novel entitled *The Satanist*. Its author, *Dennis Wheatley*, wrote a number of such books on the Occult and 'Black Magic', and had obviously done a lot of research in these fields. At the time I came across this book, I had no conscious knowledge of Dharma (*that was to come later*), but one passage in it had such an impact on me that I copied it down and still have it in my notes. I feel it was an important introduction, or maybe it resonated with and activated, dormant memories in my mind, and until today, I am grateful for having found it, as it accords with the way I see things. I reproduce it here:

In its highest sense, Light symbolizes the growth of the spirit towards that perfection in which it can throw off the body and become Light itself.

But the road to perfection is long and arduous—too much to hope for in one short human life. Hence the widespread belief in Reincarnation—that we are born again and again until we begin to despise the pleasures of the flesh.

Yet it is the inner core of truth common to all religions at their inception. Consider the Teachings of Jesus Christ with that in mind,

and you will be amazed that you have not realized before the true purport of His message. Did He not say that "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you"? And when He walked upon the waters, declared: "These things that I do ye shall do also; and greater things than these shall ye do, for I go unto my Father which is in Heaven"—meaning, almost certainly, that He had achieved perfection, and that others had the same power within each one of them to do likewise.

Unfortunately, the hours of the night are still equal to the hours of the day, and so the power of Darkness is no less active than it was when the World was young, and no sooner does a fresh master appear to reveal the Light, than ignorance, greed and lust for power cloud the minds of his followers; the message becomes distorted, and the simplicity of the Truth submerged and forgotten in the pomp of ceremonies and the meticulous performance of rituals which have lost their meanings.

Yet the real Truth is never entirely lost, and through the centuries new masters are continually arising to proclaim it, or, if the time is not propitious, to pass it on in secret to the chosen few.

By quoting this, I want to indicate that Dharma—whether or not it is called Dharma is completely irrelevant; we shouldn't get stuck on or become addicted to words of any language—is never far away; it is not the monopoly of Buddhism, but can be found even in pulp-novels or in newspapers blowing around the streets; in fact, if we understood, we would see it everywhere; there is no place, no time, no body or no thing where Dharma cannot be found; nay, more than this: Everything is Dharma!

But many of us don't/won't see this because we want to exclude others from *our* truth, want to possess and restrict, unable to see that this is as futile and fallacious as trying to chain the sea! We become attached to scriptures and other

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forms, interpreting them in narrow ways. I remember how people in a Meditation Center where I spent some time in Malaysia used to intellectualize and split hairs over silly things, obviously thinking they were achieving something thereby; they refused to use the word 'reincarnation' because—they said—it wasn't a Buddhist but a Hindu concept, as it implied the 'passing-over' of an immortal soul from one body to another, which Buddhism denies. Instead, they preferred the word 'rebirth'. But just an iota of insight would have shown them that, according to the Buddhist concept, this is also incorrect, for nothing is 'reborn' ('re' = 'again', so 're-born' = 'born-again'). Wherein, therefore, is the word 'rebirth' more appropriate than the word 'reincarnation'? They were just wasting time. Life is a process, a movement, like the sea. The rise and fall of the waves is caused by a current of energy passing through the water; there are no waves apart from the water, and there is nothing static or permanent that passes through the waves, from one to another. So, although Buddhists, for convenience, use the term 'rebirth', nothing is actually 'reborn', as nothing in our mind-body remains the same for two consecutive moments even while we are alive; how much moreso when we are dead?

It is not enough just to read and recite scriptures; if we are really to understand them we must apply and test them so that they become living experiences. We learn very slowly and painfully, and from many sources; indeed, we are deeply indebted to many people for helping us on our journey in many ways. Is this not sufficient reason to love humanity? Here, the words of Charlie Brown of *Peanuts*-fame come to mind: "I love humanity; it's people that I can't stand!" There's something profound in this. We might dislike someone, but that need not prevent us from loving that same person, for like and love are things quite different in nature; it is very important to know this.

**W**e are all members of society, which is composed of many kinds of people; some may be altruistic and self-sacrificing,

while at the other end of the scale there are criminals, vandals and other stupid people who, far from contributing anything positive to society, are destructive and parasitical. But they are members of society, too, and efforts must be made to rehabilitate them. There are many cases of people with negative and anti-social attitudes being transformed by kindness shown to them by others, just as there are cases of people being alienated and hardened by condemnation and punishment. Treatment of wrong-doers must be corrective, not punitive and vengeful. If we do something for the benefit of society as a whole, our actions embrace and include those we dislike as well as those we like; we do not say: "I'm doing this for these but not for those"; community-action is for all, because it is done from LOVE.

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## BODY AND MIND

**E**XAMINE ALMOST ANY FOOD-PACKAGE today and we find, beside the list of ingredients, the virtues of the product extolled: "High Energy", "Low Calories", "High Fiber", "Low Sugar", "Low Salt", "Low Cholesterol", "Enriched with Vitamins and Minerals", "No Additives", etc.; the list goes on and on, often in technical jargon and chemical terms which are, one often thinks, designed to bamboozle the layman. Are the big food-manufacturers really concerned about the health of the consumers or more interested in their own profits?

We talk of 'wholesome-food' and 'junk-food', and willingly pay more for brand-names, often getting fleeced thereby. But, while paying much attention to the food that goes into our stomachs, we seldom reflect on the other kind of food which is of equal importance as the food we sustain our bodies by, and perhaps moreso: the nourishment of the spirit—and I use the term 'spirit' here rather than the word 'mind', as I'm referring to something more than just the mental. The mind is broad and open, has many aspects, and includes all we mean by words like 'spirit', 'soul', 'heart', 'sub-conscious', 'super-conscious', and so on. But, to make it clear that I am speaking of the spiritual-aspect of the mind, I will use the word 'spirit' here.

Our spirit needs nourishment just as does our body. If the body is deprived of food it weakens and eventually dies; and should the spirit be different? Many of us neglect our spirits—unaware that we have an 'inner life' to take care of—and are literally starving to death, spiritually. It's not surprising that there is so much frustration, greed, rage, violence and suffering in the world when the causes of these effects go unrecognized and untreated; it is not surprising at all!

Jesus once said: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God". I accept the meaning of this, but because I



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reject the idea of 'God', would rephrase it a little: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but also by Dharma". We all need Dharma, or Righteousness, for our inner life; without it, we dry up at the roots, like a plant deprived of water. It does not mean that we should go regularly to the temple or church, or call ourselves 'Buddhist', 'Christian', 'this' or 'that'; we may do so, of course, but doing *only* that does not make us religious, and often has little to do with Dharma. By 'bread', of course, Jesus meant material things in general, and not merely that thing made of flour, yeast and water.

Another time, a man said to him: "Lord, allow me first to bury my father, and I will follow you". His father was probably old and not expected to live much longer, and the man wished to do his filial duty by tending his father till the end and giving him a proper funeral before leaving home and family to follow Jesus. But Jesus said to him: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury the dead" (Matt 8:22). The Bible does not explain what Jesus meant, and we are not told if the man understood or not. It is rather cryptic. How is it to be understood? From the horror-movies, we are familiar with the idea of 'zombies'; a 'zombie' is some-body which, according to the cult of 'Voo-Doo', has been 'raised from the dead' but is devoid of consciousness; in other words, 'living-dead'. Is this what Jesus meant? No, he was talking of another kind of 'dead': people who live as if they are dead, people who are starved spiritually or inwardly, who live mere physically, those who have not yet been born spiritually.

**We** hear a lot today about being 'born again', meaning having been 'reborn' in religious faith; Christians often use this term, though the concept is not confined to them. Buddhists speak about 'having insight into Reality', a very deep, personal and life-transforming experience; it may be equated to being 'born again', born into an awareness of life hitherto unknown. Until such rebirth, many people live as if dead; the world is full of them; they wander through life without direction, not knowing

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where they came from, where they are, nor where they are going. Many of them live in selfish, uncaring ways, unaware that it is impossible to live by and for self alone, as we depend so much upon others, and this dependency carries with it a responsibility towards others, a responsibility which, if not fulfilled, brings repercussions that lead to our impoverishment.

According to Buddhism, when someone dies, he goes to face the results of his karma—his actions—done while living in this world, and in the New Testament, we find St. Paul saying: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). What can anyone do for the dead? I have my karma and you have yours, and, like airplane tickets, it is 'non-transferable'. The Buddha taught that we get the results of our own karma, each by himself; no-one can save another. Thus, the duty of the living—those who are spiritually aware—is to the living, not to the dead, for the dead have left our sphere of influence; it might be possible to help some of the living—those with whom we share this world—to awaken to the importance of living now, while we may, and not delay until we are old, sick, or near death, which might well be too late. The message of Jesus, therefore—similar to that of the Buddha, who lived and taught 500 years earlier—was "Live now, for tomorrow never comes". The Buddha taught that Nirvana is to be found in this world and not in the hereafter; in fact, the only time there ever is, is *NOW*, for we can live neither in the past nor in the future.

Now, Nirvana, or the Unconditioned, is not a place but a state of mind. Prince Siddhartha, otherwise known as 'Sakyamuni', attained Nirvana at the age of 35 and was known, thereafter, as 'The Buddha', meaning 'The Awakened One'. When He passed away at the age of 80, He entered what is called '*Parinirvana*', or the state of Nirvana with no physical base. He said: "If a person were to follow me for 100 years, holding the edge of my robe, but with a mind defiled by the Three Poisons

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of Greed, Hatred and Delusion, he would never see me. But he whose mind is free of these Poisons, even though he lives far away from me, would see me all the time. He who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha", meaning that the state of Buddhahood, or Awakening, is not a physical condition but a mental or spiritual state, attained by realizing Truth or Reality.

**A** vision of Reality which we shall later know more fully, has an effect similar to that of a can-opener: of liberating us from the narrow confines of self and making us broad and wide-open. Anything that makes us narrow, intolerant and bigoted cannot be Reality, but just a mirage, something of our imagination, or something that we got from someone else, second-, third- or multi-hand. An experience which can be grasped onto, claimed as 'mine', and makes us more selfish instead of less is, at most, a psychic experience, but certainly not a spiritual one, for a genuine spiritual experience burns out the element of self in us, lessens and weakens it. This is one way by which we can test our experiences: do they make us more or less proud, egoistic, narrow and intolerant?

**We** know the importance of having adequate Vitamins A, B, C, etc., for our physical bodies, but we also need adequate Vitamin W for our spiritual bodies, for our inner life. Vitamin W means WISDOM, a quality that this world is in dire need of today. It has been edged out, shunted aside, overshadowed, and almost overcome by technology and academic-learning masquerading as Wisdom—a wolf disguised as a lamb.

It is interesting, though, and encouraging, for in spite of the gross stupidities that flourish in the world, in spite of the fact that many people delight in flaunting their ignorance as if it were a virtue or treasure—something to be proud rather than ashamed of—Wisdom still occasionally shines through, sometimes from unexpected quarters. Take the *Star Wars* movies for example, and other big-hit Sci-Fi films: through and behind all the violence Wisdom is elevated and revered. As in the

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great epics of ancient times, of maybe all religions and cultures—Mahabharata, The Odyssey, the Epic of Gilgamesh, Ramayana, etc.—usually there is a Sage or wise man behind the triumph of Good over Evil. You may say: "Ah, but that's only in the movies or the stories". No, it's not; it's part of our collective psyche, which is why we can appreciate it in the stories. The success of such movies, therefore, assures us that Wisdom has not been completely overcome or discarded.

**Wisdom**, however, is not confined to people with gray hair; it knows no such limits. Sometimes we meet old people who are quite foolish, who have spent their lives in useless pursuits, learned little from the passing years, and have grown old in vain. Sometimes, too, we meet young people—even children—who seem to be wise quite naturally. It is not something that comes automatically with age. Nor is it a matter of having gone through college and university and emerged with a string of degrees after one's name, as we not infrequently come across people who are highly educated in a particular and narrow academic area, but who, in other areas, are quite naïve and ignorant. What, then, is Wisdom? Is it not the ability to discern the difference between right and wrong, true and false, and to live accordingly? Is it not the faculty of recognizing the realities of life-as-it-is-and-not-as-we-would-like-it-to-be?

**We** know we must be equipped with various kinds of knowledge in order to earn a living and survive in the world, but is that the totality of life—just earning a living and surviving? Isn't it something much more than that? There are two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge whereby we earn a living, and that whereby we live—live among others, as members of society. In schools and universities the pressure to compete and succeed, to become somebody—*Number One*, if possible—is so great that it's not surprising many people become neurotic and the suicide-rate among students is so high; such education is very

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dangerous and destructive—look how much trouble stems from it, including that ultimate form of folly, the Arms Race!

Some people argue that without competitive-spirit we will not develop and progress, but this is just short-sightedness; a much better and less destructive way to make progress and develop is by Cooperation or Working Together, and who will say this cannot be taught or shown in school? I don't deny there is pleasure and excitement in competition—and often a great deal—but it is usually for self, a thing of the ego, and it in no way compares with the joys of cooperating with others for mutual benefit and for the betterment of society as a whole. In competition, where there are winners there are also losers, and losers seldom feel good about losing, while with cooperation, not one person wins, but all who are involved.

There are various current world-views—that is, ways of looking at the world. Indeed, most of us have such a world-view, but in most cases, it was inherited from others and is not the result of personal research and thought. Some world-views take account of Man only, and disregard other aspects of life; indeed, those that do so even divide Mankind into categories like 'The Saved and the Damned', 'Believers and Unbelievers', and so on. But now, we are being forced to recognize that there are other forms of life apart from Man that are important and that any respectable world-view must take into account. Man does not live alone, but by a complex life-support system involving many other forms of life. An understanding of this gives rise to a sense of 'belonging', of being '*a part of*' instead of '*apart from*', and following closely upon the heels of this discovery, there arise gratitude, wonder, appreciation, reverence for life, *joie-de-vivre* and Love. And these, in turn, unlock and open the Gates of Wisdom in our hearts.

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## DISCOVERY

**D**URING THE RENAISSANCE OF THE 14th-15th centuries in Europe, when the shackles of the Dark Ages were being sundered and the Spirit of Discovery was in the air, the idea that 'Man is the measure of all things' came into being and slowly took hold. This was a tremendous mental step forward and, needless to say, was vehemently opposed by the Church, which felt its power-base undermined and threatened thereby.

It has taken hundreds of years since then—years marked by Industrial Revolutions and the rapacious exploitation of the Earth's bounty—for us to begin to see, as is now happening, that the concept of 'Man as the measure of all things' is also incorrect and has led to all manner of excesses. Only now, when the effects of our thoughtlessness are being felt, are we starting to realize that the Earth and everything on it is not ours to do with just as we like, but that we are living here and sharing it with countless other life-forms. This realization, whether it comes from inside our own minds or is forced upon us from outside, must bring about a transformation of consciousness towards the world we live in and the Earth we live on; we must critically examine our relationship to the Whole of which we are parts: Do *we* belong to *it*, or does *it* belong to *us*? In a mystical way, both are true; but from an everyday, practical point-of-view, we, as parts, belong to the Whole—not in a Stalinist sort of way, wherein the parts are seen as existing *for* the Whole (or the State), and regarded as expendable and to be subjugated, but because the Whole cannot exist *without* the parts.

**We** live in a very-exciting time, where, on one hand, we are faced, still, with the threat of nuclear holocaust and ecological disaster, and on the other hand—and largely because of the former—we see the collapse of many old dogmas and concepts that have impeded our progress for centuries. There is the possibility, at last, of a union of Science and Religion. Now

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is the time for a 'Great Leap Forward' of the Spirit, a time to put aside faint-heartedness and to summon up strength and courage from within.

**We**, in the so-called 'developed' world, have reached a standard of living hitherto unknown in history. But it didn't just happen overnight as the result of three wishes granted us by a 'genie-in-a-jar'; it crept up on us gradually, like day emerging from night, or as the growing of our hair. And because of this, we have grown used to it and now take it for granted and even expect more, and this is where the danger lies: not in the material prosperity itself, but in our dull and thoughtless acceptance of it. We have been overdosed with it all and unable to make the necessary adjustments. So, that which we took into our house as a servant has become a thief and has robbed us of our self-reliance. And whenever something unexpected and unplanned for happens, we get scared and don't know what to do; our tenuous sense of security gives way to insecurity, and most of us, having concentrated mainly on the material aspect of life, have few spiritual resources to fall back upon, or have lost touch with the inner life so completely that we have forgotten its existence. Then, as always when trouble arises, we fall back upon our various gods for help, but the gods either do not exist, are deaf, do not care, are impotent, or simply enjoy the tragi-comedy enacted by foolish humanity, and so no help is forthcoming.

**A** time of fine weather is a time to repair the holes in the roof where the rain gets in; it is unwise to wait for the rain to come before fixing them. Likewise, a time of peace is a time to prepare for unpeace—not by stockpiling arms and building fall-out shelters, but for moral-rearmament: developing our inner resources and defenses. How might we do this? By understanding something of the nature of life *as it is*, rather than as we would like it to be. Usually, we oppose life and are in conflict with it, trying either to grasp and possess it or to drive it

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away; we pit our puny selves against the irresistible forces of life, instead of learning how to work with them.

A certain philosopher summed up life in these words: "We are born, we suffer, we die". But can life be summed up so briefly and bleakly? If that were all there is to it, maybe we *could* put it so, but though we do indeed suffer and die, we also learn and develop and contribute to life, directly or indirectly, actively or passively. We have not always lived as we live now; 10,000 years ago and less—a mere blink in the life of the Universe!—we were living in caves, with no written language or technology beyond the ability to use fire and chip flint into crude weapons and tools. Our ancestors suffered and died, but each generation passed something on to the succeeding one, and we of the present are the heirs of the countless generations of our ancestors. How can we hold back tears of sorrow, admiration, gratitude and love for them and their sufferings when they left us so much? They lived and died for us, did they not? And now, who are we living for—just ourselves?

Dazzled and mesmerized by the material prosperity of the West, almost the whole world seems to want to adopt it as its model, ignoring its soaring crime-rate, its fear, tension, competitiveness, hedonism and deep-rooted dissatisfaction. Since World War II, apart from numerous regional conflicts, we have had a period of overall peace, but it has been a very tense peace, like a drawn bow (actually, World War II never really ended but continued in other forms); this has had serious ramifications on our psychic health: few of us know inner peace. Killer-diseases like smallpox, diphtheria and TB have either been eradicated or brought under control, but others have appeared or increased to take their places: stress-induced, like high blood-pressure and heart-disease, immune-system breakdowns like cancer and AIDS, cerebral diseases like stroke, Alzheimer's or Parkinson's, mental diseases like schizophrenia, manic-depression, drug-addiction. And another, which falls



## DISCOVERY }

in the latter category and should be treated as a disease—as it really *is* a *dis*-ease—is Boredom, for it makes us feel listless, worthless, devoid of a sense of hope, purpose and direction in life, and leads to all kinds of mischief, crime, destructiveness and often, to suicide.

It is sad to so-often hear people these days complain of being bored and having 'nothing to do', when we have so many forms of ready-made entertainment and so many marvelous things to wonder at. We have so much leisure-time, and are surely more fortunate, in so many ways, than people ever were before, but we are also more bored, and our fortune is wasted; we have become dull in our imitation of others and our eyes do not see. Only when we have lost it—and there's always a possibility of this—might we realize the value and wonder of what we now have. What a tragedy! *Bored?! We are bored because the good things that we have so abundantly came to us from others, without us having a hand in their creation and production or really earning them ourselves; we think that, just because we have money to buy them with, that is all that matters. But too much of something good—and one example of this is freedom—becomes not good; we take it lightly, lose appreciation of it, become satiated and jaded; our fortune becomes misfortune and drags us down. But must it be so? No, we must say; No, we must shout; it must not be so! We must not let our creation become our destruction but our salvation!*

**B**ut we all become bored at times, do we not? Yes, this is true, so we must know how to look at boredom, how to observe and examine it, and then it might be possible to turn it around. From sorrow comes joy, from failure comes success, from weakness comes strength, from ignorance comes knowledge, from defeat comes victory, and so on. It's all a matter of knowing how to look at things, of accepting things as they are, of knowing how to extract the essence, of seeing what can be done next and where to go from there—in a word: Alchemy!

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For food to be digested and sustenance derived therefrom, it must first be *ingested*. By accepting things as they are and entering into their spirit, complacency, boredom or fatalism do not result, but, on the contrary, a sense of wonder and awe, of adventure, and the discovery of worlds and dimensions undreamed of before, like as when we look through a powerful telescope at the night-sky, or through a microscope at the teeming life-forms there. All things—not excluding ourselves—are seen to be constantly new and different, like the patterns in a kaleidoscope. In most cases, we are just beginning to learn about ourselves—this living miracle; there is so much to be discovered! If we saw this, boredom would soon disappear. Here, in this knowledge, is the antidote to the modern disease of Boredom: Discovering Life. Many of us think that, just because the Earth has been charted and mapped-out, the Age of Discovery is over, and we must resign ourselves to the 'monotony' of everyday life, but it is not so. Life is waiting for us to discover it, waiting for us to open our eyes and marvel at the beauty and treasures that surround us on all sides.

***LIFE: Be in it!***

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE DHARMA IN A SNEEZE

BECAUSE WE LIVE AS members of society, we are obligated to observe how our actions affect others; we have this capacity, so why not use it? And if we see our actions affect others adversely, we should do something to correct them.

Signs in the ferries plying between Butterworth and Penang in Malaysia read: "No spitting. It's disgusting, and it spreads disease." Disease is often spread from one person to another, usually inadvertently, but sometimes through carelessness and inconsideration. Good things are worth sharing, but things like disease and bad habits should be—as far as possible—kept to oneself and hopefully, eliminated, rather than passed on. And why people create and spread computer viruses, which cause so much trouble to others, mystifies me. They must have a grudge against society or hate the world. They would not like anyone to do that to them, but have no hesitation about using their expertise in such negative ways. Strange, isn't it? I even heard, in Melbourne, of AIDS-infected syringes being found lodged in the slides of children's playing-areas! Human beings can be so twisted and bitter, when they have such a lot to be thankful for.

A few years ago, there was a movie called *OUTBREAK*, about the appearance in the U.S. of a terrible disease similar to the as-yet incurable hemorrhagic plague known as *Ebola*. From an initial single case, this terror began to spread, causing panic. It was discovered that the virus responsible for it was airborne, and a scene in a packed cinema showed how a sneeze accomplished this, infecting scores of people there.

A gift must be something of value, both to the giver and the receiver; if it has no value of any kind it is not a gift; we dump garbage, not give it away. So, primarily, a gift must be a thing that the giver wants and values himself, and the more he wants

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and values it, the greater the gift it is. Now, no-one wants or values disease, do they? It is something they wish to be free of. And so, not wanting it themselves, they know that no-one else wants it, too. Therefore, they try to avoid passing it on.

One of the most important qualities to Buddhists is Compassion, which involves or concerns others. Out of compassion, we learn to consider the rights and feelings of others and treat them fairly. Now, is it considerate to share our bacteria with others by means of sneezing explosively in public? Just because we cannot or do not see the bacteria in the myriads of tiny droplets of saliva forcibly expelled by a sneeze doesn't mean they are not there; they *are* there. Is that a gift from you? Out of consideration for others, and in order not to expose them to the bacteria in your saliva, why not either sneeze into a handkerchief and so contain your germs, or, better still, learn how to *implode* your sneezes by closing your mouth and maybe holding your nose? It is another way of reminding yourself—of being mindful—of your ability to improve the world and make it a little bit better; it is also an expression of your understanding. Dharma is not something far away or mysterious, but ordinary or common; by paying attention to the ordinary, however, we find something special therein; in actual fact, everything is special and not ordinary at all!



## WHERE DO WE STAND?

IT IS WRITTEN SOMEWHERE: "The *real* pain is the pain of realizing that the Way does not prevail in the world." All the evil and most of the suffering in the world comes from Ignorance and Stupidity. If we understood this we could do something to bring about a change for the better. And the more people who understand, the more we can change things; we are not powerless unless we think we are. Working alone, no-one can build a house, make a car or an airplane, etc., but cooperating with others for a common purpose, it is possible.

There is adequate food and other necessities in the world for everyone, but while some people have not enough, others have too much, and the gap between those who have and those who have-not grows wider and wider. What is lacking is Dharma or spiritual wealth, and until people undergo a transformation of consciousness and learn to consider others instead of thinking just of themselves this imbalance will go on, and no amount of legislation or war will correct it.

Now, nobody is so naïve as to reasonably expect huge numbers of people to drastically and voluntarily change their outlook on life; change comes about slowly in humanity as a whole. But we can—you and I—begin to move in that direction ourselves, and if we do, we shall surely bump into and discover other individuals moving along the same road; there are people waking up to reality all around us, one-by-one, each with their hopes, fears and aspirations, but they don't wear identification-tabs or make a great show to draw attention to themselves; yet we shall know them when we meet them as kindred-spirits.

It has often been said that "Adversity brings out the best in us," but this is being optimistic, because, while it *might* be true, the converse is equally so: it brings out the worst in us! For suffering and hardship to be of any eventual benefit to us we

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must first have a foundation of Dharma, so that we might be able to turn things around; without such a foundation, it is easy to fall into the habit of complaining, blaming others, feeling sorry for ourselves, or—worse—exploiting the situation for personal gain regardless of the effect upon others, like hoarding, black-marketeering, and so on.

We have ridden the wave for quite a long time already, enjoying the comforts and luxuries of modern life; but now the wave is curling over and threatens to hurl us into the trough below; how long can maintain our balance on the crest? Each extra day is a bonus, not a right to be taken for granted, and should be treasured for what it is, because, unfortunately, it cannot last. We are living in a 'fool's paradise,' and if we are not rudely awoken by some warmongering madman, it seems that climatic changes will effect this. Are we prepared, or have we been lulled, softened, weakened and robbed by our luxurious living? Time will tell, and probably sooner than we think.

\* \* \* \* \*

I heard an amusing little story while in the United States this year: A Vietnamese Buddhist had been repeatedly approached by a Protestant pastor, and pressured to go to his church. Finally, he said to the pastor: "I won't go to your church because I don't want to go to your heaven."

Surprised at this, the pastor asked, "Why not?"

"Because", said the Buddhist, "according to you, everyone who doesn't believe as you do will go to hell, which means that all my friends and relatives will be there. Therefore, I prefer to go to hell and be with my friends than to go to your heaven where I wouldn't know anyone!" *Bravo!*



## NO EAST, NO WEST

THE ORIENT IS—OR WAS, AT LEAST—often termed “The Inscrutable East,” as if Orientals were a different species. But is the Eastern mind really different from the Western (or the Southern from the Northern)? There are differences in the way people think, certainly, but are the differences inherent in the mind, or are they not more of culture and conditioning? Is there really an ‘Asian mind’ distinct from a ‘Western mind’?

We love to see differences, often where there are none, or where they are trifling and unimportant; we overlook the essential things that bind us together, or were maybe never even aware of them to begin with. Some years ago, I went to visit a couple near London who I had corresponded with for some time but had never met. When they picked me up at the train-station, almost the first thing the husband said to me was: “I see you haven’t lost your northern accent.” I was stunned by his rudeness, but later on understood it when his wife (who was the one I’d been writing to) informed me that he was illiterate; at forty-eight, *he didn’t know how to read or write, and he was concerned about my accent!*

This kind of thing is quite common. I can think of many countries where there is prejudice on the part of people from one area towards those of another area, without knowing them; it is so in the U.S., Germany, France, Italy, India, Vietnam, Korea, China, and no doubt many others, if not all except the smallest. And most of it comes from ignorance and misunderstanding, which we should be ashamed to display. The world has shrunk, and we are well-into a world-culture now; more people travel to other countries now than ever before; we are able to see things differently than our ancestors did. Without moving from our homes, we see, on TV, how people of other races and places live basically the same as we do. This being so, it is quite amazing how some people can travel abroad on

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business or vacation and still keep their prejudice intact; it must require quite an effort to do so, and a resistance to what is.

**“What is now known about human prehistory ought to be taught as a required course, at least in high schools,” to help youngsters realize that “all people are members of the same species, that the cultural differences that separate us—such as our 4000-or-more different languages—can be understood and do not mean that some are superior to others in any significant respect. Babies of any race or population, taken to and reared in any other population would be expected to be indistinguishable from native children mentally and even morally. Superficial physical differences (skin-color, hair-type, body-type and size, facial differences, etc.) are unimportant in comparison with the artificial cultural differences that are acquired from society.” (Clyde Davis).**

During my primary-school days in England, there was a single black child, the unforeseen result of a liaison, at the end of the Second World War, between a local woman and a black-American serviceman stationed nearby. Because American servicemen had plenty of money in England, which was practically bankrupt after the War, it was not difficult for them to find female company. I grew up with this boy, and when we—the ‘whites’ (it carries a terrible connotation, doesn’t it?)—didn’t think about it or were not annoyed with him for anything, we accepted him as one of us. And why not? you might ask. Yes, why not? But kids are kids, and do not think their own thoughts. I didn’t know then what I later learned through my travels, and so—not surprisingly—noticed the difference about him, as there was a difference, and even writing about it here means that I remember the difference. He lived with his mother, step-father, step-brothers-and-sisters, but bore his father’s surname. Thinking back on it, it must have been hard for him at times, to be different like that. I don’t know what became of him later, but I wish him well wherever he now is.



It is not enough to complacently wait for prejudice to decrease and tolerance to increase; we must push for it because it is right—push for it in the world around us, *and* inside ourselves. It comes from understanding. Many people struggled and suffered in order to win the freedom and privileges we enjoy; we shouldn't take them for granted, but should show our appreciation by taking care of them and helping to increase them, as this is what civilization is about. With an understanding of Universal Dharma, we see beyond petty differences.

A lot of twaddle is talked about 'human rights' today, which means we haven't got the real thing. People rant and rave about it as if they had conceived the idea, but very often, it is just 'hot air,' with little substance (an exception being the very active and laudable organization known as *Amnesty International*, which does a tremendous amount of good work and sometimes gets severely rebuffed by repressive regimes for it, which shows it is touching sensitive spots). And the ones who spout the most, of course, are those who feel themselves deprived, in some way, of what they consider to be 'their rights.' But would they—one wonders—speak so loudly about 'rights' if they were in positions of authority, or would they conveniently develop amnesia on this point, or come up with endless devious excuses to explain their change of attitude and reluctance to do anything to implement their former 'principles'?

If we dare presume that we have any 'rights'—'rights' that were won by people whose names we don't know, so that we could benefit from them—we must also recognize that others, and not just ourselves, have 'rights,' too. But do we behave as if we understood this? Or do we behave as if the whole universe exists just for us and our convenience? It would reward us to do some hard thinking on this point, among others.

Is it reasonable to always expect our 'rights' and complain if we are not accorded them? Certainly, I believe very strongly in

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standing up and fighting for what I think is right. But for *my* 'rights'? Why do I even think I have any 'rights'? Life is often brutal in its impartiality; who, having been born, can escape from aging, sickness, pain and death? As someone once put it: "Life is a terminal disease; no-one gets out of it alive." What rights do we have in the eyes of natural law? Men's laws come and go and are often bent for those who can afford to pay or who have connections in high places; but *natural* law, like gravity, is unswerving; it shows no favoritism and cannot be bribed; a rich man gets wet in the rain just as does a poor man; his wealth does not make him immune to that. Moreover, the concept of 'Human-rights,' as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, is relatively new and very fragile, being disregarded whenever it suits governments to do so. Certainly, it is a wonderful thing, and one which we should take care to preserve and develop, but it is just a beginning and there is no guarantee of human-rights being respected in actuality and not just on paper. As to our personal part, however, if we are to reasonably expect to enjoy them ourselves, we must first be prepared to accord them to others. Simple, isn't it? All that is required is for us to put it into practice!

To conclude: East and West, North and South are more mind-made than geographical areas. We had no choice about where we were born, but we do have choice about how we think of the world. We can think Small, Closed, Narrow; we can think Big, Open, Wide.



## PICTURE OF PEACE

“THERE WAS ONCE A KING who offered a prize to the artist who could paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for the peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

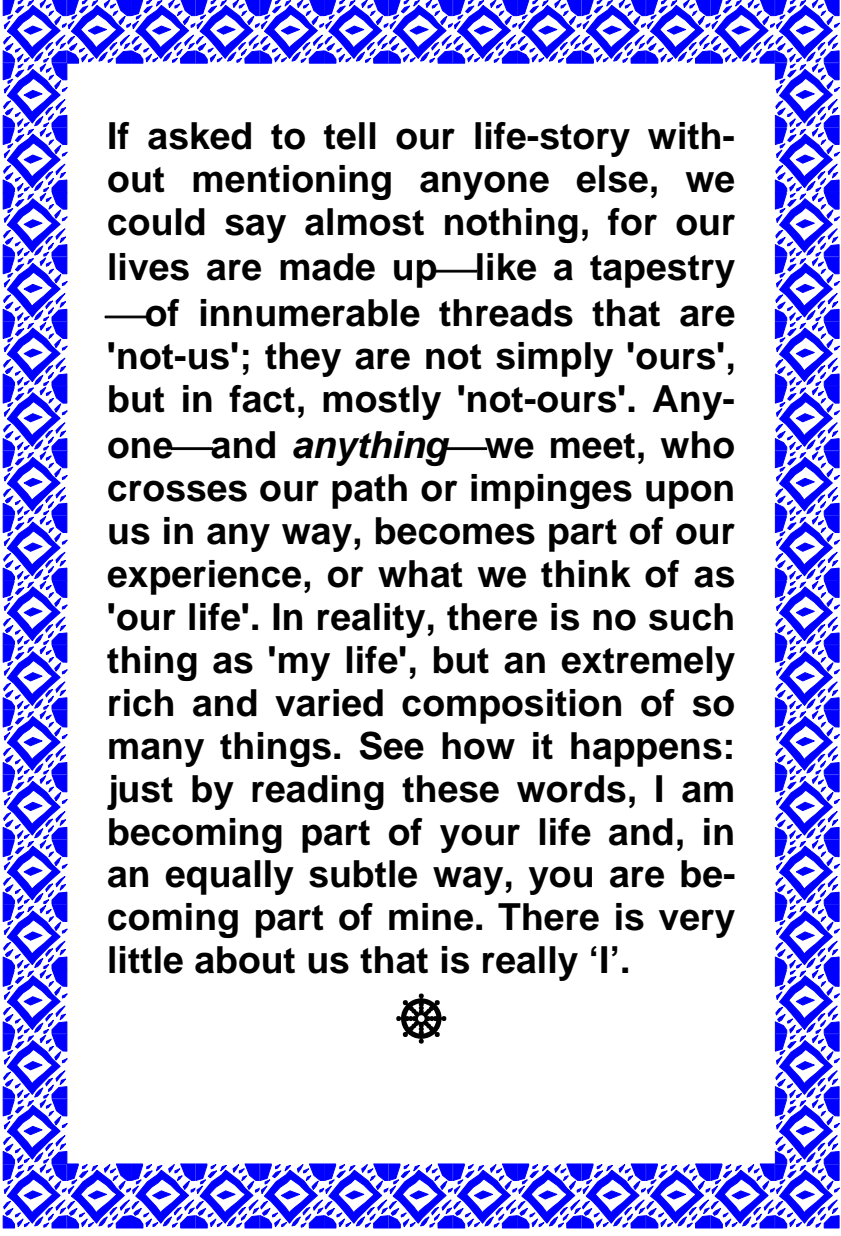
The second picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell, and in which lightning played. Down the mountainside tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the King looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest ... a picture of perfect peace.

Which of the pictures won the prize? The King chose the second picture. Do you know why?

“Because,” explained the King, “peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.”

*Author unknown.*





If asked to tell our life-story without mentioning anyone else, we could say almost nothing, for our lives are made up—like a tapestry—of innumerable threads that are 'not-us'; they are not simply 'ours', but in fact, mostly 'not-ours'. Anyone—and *anything*—we meet, who crosses our path or impinges upon us in any way, becomes part of our experience, or what we think of as 'our life'. In reality, there is no such thing as 'my life', but an extremely rich and varied composition of so many things. See how it happens: just by reading these words, I am becoming part of your life and, in an equally subtle way, you are becoming part of mine. There is very little about us that is really 'I'.

