

A decorative rectangular border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, framing the central text.

## DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to all those who have  
made it possible through donating their time,  
efforts and money. May they be well and happy.*

## INTRODUCTION

**MORE AND MORE, AS PEOPLE BREAK AWAY FROM AND** abandon the name-and-form of traditional religion, there is a pressing need for something to take its place, something for them to fall back on — not, it must be said, that will eventually bind them as the chains of organized religion bound people in the past, but something that will provide them with a foundation for living and a set of values to enable them to deal with the problems and difficulties of life.

Nowadays — and particularly in the West — it is quite common to hear people say: "I have no religion". But this does not necessarily mean that they live irreligiously, immorally and uncaringly; some do, some don't. It often means that they do not subscribe to any particular creed or belief-system, but are open and ready to learn.

Actually, it would be infinitely better if we did not label ourselves and others as 'Buddhists', 'Hindus', 'Christians', 'Jews', etc., because, not knowing who or what we are — and come on, let's face it: we really don't know, do we? — no name is adequate or appropriate. Moreover, it is not rare for people of different religious brand-names, or even of different sects of the same religion, to dislike, hate, or even make war on each other. Religion divides, while Dharma (in the sense of Truth or Reality) unites.

A name is a limitation. When/if we call ourselves 'Buddhists', for example (or 'Christians', 'Muslims', 'Hindus', and so on), at the same time, without words, we are also saying what we are not: we are not Muslims, not Christians, not Hindus, etc. Do we not therefore restrict and deprive ourselves of so much? If, on the other hand, however, we were to consider ourselves to be simply human, the treasure-house of the world's wisdom would be open to us all.

Buddhists, at least, have no excuse for not looking at things in this way, for the Buddha said that if we find Truth or Dharma in other religions, we should accept it; He did not say that Truth is the monopoly of His system alone.

I can be, and often am, I confess, narrowly Buddhist. But when I am able to see things in clearer perspective, without walls, barriers, and labels, and can present things as such to others, I feel a liberating joy. Why we were born where we were born, we really do not know, but we can be sure that it wasn't by choice, for who would choose to be born in places of great suffering like Somalia, Ethiopia, or Cambodia? This does not mean that the place of our birth was accidental, any more than our birth was, but we can be born in only one place at a time. And if there is any truth in the widely-believed concept of rebirth or reincarnation, we might have been born and lived in many places all over the world, as members of both sexes, and various races and nationalities. There would be little support, therefore, for the pride of race or nation; indeed, racialism and nationalism demonstrate that we have the mentality of frogs in a well!

Certainly, when we live as members of a society — any society — we must understand certain things, and must consider other people, but we must begin by understanding ourselves. What do we want from life? This is a simple but important question, and it should be asked and answered honestly. Do we, or do we not, want to be happy? Do we, or do we not, wish to suffer and be sad? Do we wish others to be kind to us and help us, or to hurt us in various ways? The answers are obvious, are they not? And, when we understand what we want, we will also understand others, as they feel exactly the same way as we do. We begin by understanding ourselves, because it is the only place we can begin. We begin with ourselves, but we do not stop there; we go on and outwards, and discover the truth and beauty of the Religion of Life and Living.

Should we not try to avoid the traps and pitfalls of sectarianism and search instead for Universal Dharma, which applies to and includes us all, like the sky that covers the whole Earth?

This book is a selection of articles from some of my earlier books, which are no longer available. There are also several new and previously-unpublished articles. I offer it to people who are free enough to consider it. OMI

Kuala Lumpur, 1994.

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## MUST WE SPELL EVERYTHING?

ONCE, AFTER GIVING SEVERAL DHARMA-TALKS SOME-where in Malaysia, I was invited to give a further talk, and was 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 this forms a major part of the practical application of the Dharma. It indicated to me 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 could contain no more. I recall beginning one of those talks by explaining the importance of knowing how to listen to a Dharma-talk: by completely disregarding the physical appearance and personality of the speaker, but paying close attention to what he is saying, so that the listener can find out, for him/herself, whether what he/she is saying is true and relevant or not. Obviously, they had not heard this, nor what I had said about Vegetarianism. Were they the kind of people who only want words, theories, and ideas, which they can then repeat and impress others with?

Is Dharma only something to talk about, an intellectual toy? Obviously it is, to many people. But we will never discover what Dharma is by following such an approach. The Dharma is a way of living, that expresses our Buddha-nature, or Enlightenment-principle; it is not — or should not be — something apart from daily living. But it seems that we can listen to too many Dharma-talks and read too many books, and become dull and intellectually-conspicated thereby, stuck at the level of words and ideas, unable to get off the sand-bank of conceptual thought; and this state might continue for a long time. Not being inspired upon first hearing the Dharma — which is the most crucial time — people fall into the habit of listening either as if they've heard the same thing before, or in expectation of hearing something marvelous and mystical, extraordinary and hitherto unheard of. This, of course, is the wrong way to listen to a Dharma-talk, and inevitably brings disappointment. Just as Heraclitus said: “You cannot step twice into the same stream”, so everything, every moment, is new; nothing remains the same as it was, neither is anything

repeated. Even if we were to hear exactly the same words, or to read a book over and over, still it would not be the same, for we — our minds more so than our bodies — have changed, and we see things differently because of that. Thus, though we might have heard something before, we have never heard it before; each time — every moment, every thing — is new, including you. That is why subsequent readings of a book will reveal things that we didn't notice the first or second times. So, to listen with fixed minds 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 can be produced by striking the match against the box, so contact between the minds of the speaker and the listener, via words, might ignite the flame of understanding; nor need it be anything special, of deep philosophical meaning, but just a meeting of minds in a needlepoint of time, and — flash! — “Yes, I know”!

Once, while I was living in the 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 seen them! Isn't it strange how we will see things and say: “Oh, how beautiful!” only when they 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 today sell for record, mind-boggling prices. Is it because the buyers really appreciate his art, or do they buy his paintings more for the prestige of owning them, and as a business-investment? Have they, I wonder, ever taken a close look at a real sunflower or an iris — such as he painted —

to discover the wonder of life? We do not need to go far to find beauty, nor to spend anything to possess it; it is all around us in abundance, and we don't have 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 types of weather provide us with constantly-renewed exhibitions. But to appreciate it, we must first have a beauty-base inside 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 difficult for us to see and appreciate the beauty outside of, 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 in them, they will be much less likely to turn to violence, vandalism, destruction and crime. We can, I am convinced, 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 few in number; those few, however, might help others to understand something of it, so that they come to discover, or uncover, 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.

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 it”, I replied, “but when it is alive, not dead”.

To be sure, being a vegetarian is not everything; far from it. But if, as a regular eater-of-meat, a person takes the step of becoming vegetarian — which might 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 his/her 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, that 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 the eating of meat, are such sayings of the Buddha as this from the Amagandha Sutra: “Destroying living creatures, murder, wounding, theft, false witness, treachery and deception — this, and not the mere eating of flesh, is impure”. Yes, that is true, but we must understand the context of these words: They were

spoken to people who considered that they would be defiled by eating meat, and, as Jesus said later, it is that which comes out of a person that 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 that people can eat their flesh; this is very clear, is it not? If nobody 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? 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 prepared to look and taste so much like meat that it is sometimes hard to tell the difference, but this is merely as a concession to those who find it hard to break the habit of eating meat.

But whatever we undertake, we should do so 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. Therefore, when — as sometimes happens — people say to me: "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 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!

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## THE CONTAINER AND THE CONTENTS BUDDHISM AND THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

IF YOU BUY A BOTTLE OF LEMONADE, DO YOU BUY IT FOR  
the bottle, or for the lemonade?

Buddhism, as an organized religion, with its temples, monks, devotees, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and whatever, is like a container. Unfortunately, not all Buddhists are aware of this, nor of what it contains. It is the Container of the Buddha's Teachings, and the Contents are more important than their Container.

Many people, who have never thought about it or investigated it, assume that Buddhism and the Buddha's Teachings are one and the same thing, but it is very useful to know the difference, especially in these times, when materialism reigns, and decline and corruption of religion is evident all around us, causing people to lose their faith. If we understood the difference, our faith might be strengthened instead of weakened, and this is the purpose of this article.

Buddhism began at a specific point in time, when the Buddha began His ministry at the age of 35, shortly after His Enlightenment. It had a beginning in time, and so, too, one day it will have an end; this is natural. Moreover, during the space of its existence, it has grown, changed, adapted, absorbed various elements that it came into contact with, developed rituals, ceremonies, and traditions, and became an establishment long ago; some things were added, and others subtracted, and we can be sure that it is quite different now than when it started out on its long journey.

Going deeper into Buddhism, the religion, we find the Teaching of the Buddha, but this is also a Container — a Container within a Container — because, after his Enlightenment, the Buddha had to attempt to describe what He had discovered, in order to share it with others; of course, this was very difficult, like trying to explain to a blind man about colors, or flowers, etc. But He formulated His Teachings around what He had seen, and called it "The Middle Way"; He explained about Suffering,

the Cause of Suffering, the End of Suffering, and the Way — known as 'The Eightfold Path' — to the end of Suffering, and these He called 'The Four Noble Truths'. These basic Teachings did not change during the rest of His life, though He presented them in many varying ways.

So, although His Teachings were His own way of presenting to others what He had found, He was merely trying to point out to others, who had less clarity of vision than He, what was already, and is always, HERE. He spoke about facts, which He did not invent, and which do not depend upon Him, as anyone can see. Therefore, there are three things, or three levels, that we should know about: (1) Buddhism, the religion; (2) Buddha-Dharma, or the Teachings of the Buddha, and (3) Dharma, or the Facts of Life. A Buddha is one who realizes the Facts of Life (Dharma), and reveals them to the world through His Teachings (Buddha-Dharma); Buddhism, the religion, developed out of His Teachings.

Now, after so many centuries, Buddhism is old and tired, and — not unnaturally — is beset with sickness and corruption. Many temples have degenerated into little more than business-houses or funeral parlors, where blessings are dispensed, fortunes told, horoscopes cast, charms made, spirits exorcised, etc.; some monks have become medicine-men, pandering to the superstitious desires of people who are quite ignorant of what the Buddha taught, instead of trying to help them to understand. Perhaps, soon, we must hold a funeral-ceremony for our Buddhism!

Seeing all these things — which, really, have little to do with Buddha-Dharma — many people become disgusted, and lose their faith in Buddhism; they either turn to other religions, or choose not to identify themselves with any. For this, they cannot be blamed, and can even be understood, but it is a pity that they see only the Container, and get no glimpse of the Contents. This is largely because almost nobody — the monks whose duty it is to try to explain the Way to people, that is — cares to try to help them to understand, and also because the people themselves are lazy and not interested to learn.

If you buy a new car, it will be shiny and spotless; but, after driving it for 50,000 km or more, could you reasonably expect it to look as bright and clean as when it was new? So, although the Container is not now the shining, crystal flask that it once was, and is somewhat stained and covered with the dust of time, we owe it a debt of gratitude, as it has

preserved the Contents down through the ages for us, and we can, with a little effort and perseverance, still see the Contents through the dust that covers the Container. Therefore, do not be too disappointed if the Container is no longer bright and shiny, like a new car; look deeper.

THE CONTAINER IS NOT THE CONTENTS!  
BUDDHISM IS NOT BUDDHA-DHARMA!

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## BEGINNING WITH YOURSELF

**QUESTION:** "WHAT IS THE USE OF FOLLOWING THE WAY?"

**Answer:** To answer this question, let us see what it implies. It has the taste of 'What's in it for me to make it worth my while? What can I get out of it?' But, while it sounds rather calculating and self-centered, it doesn't really matter, for this is the only place we can begin: with oneself.

It usually comes as a shock to us to learn, after resisting it for so long, and pretending/hoping that it is not so, that life as we know it, stripped of the veneer we have applied to it, is basically a state of suffering. Before anyone objects to this, saying that there is happiness, too, it should be said that, because the Universe is governed by the Law of Impermanence, even our states of happiness are potential states of suffering, because they change and become otherwise, and the higher we soar, the further we fall. As long as we grasp at happiness, seeking to possess it, this will always be so. Paradoxically, searching for happiness — something that most people spend a great deal of time doing, especially in affluent societies — is the greatest obstacle to finding it, and produces endless frustration. And so, looking for a way out of suffering, people turn to religion, seeking for merit, trying to abstain from negative, harmful deeds, and to perform positive, helpful ones. But, of course, at this stage, it is all for self, undertaken either out of fear of possible consequences of not doing certain things, or out of desire for certain things we think might come about as results of different courses of action. And it is perfectly legitimate to start out in this way, just as much so as it is for a little baby to crawl on all fours before it learns to stand and walk; no one blames babies for not being able to walk or run. But it is also necessary to know that this is only a stage, where we will not remain forever, but will go on.

Slowly, just as slowly and imperceptibly as we grow up and develop from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood — maybe even slower — our perceptions change, and we begin to see things clearer. Whereas before, when our initial response to the sufferings of life impelled us into fearfully following a religion, now we are able to look



at things with better understanding, and see things in terms of Cause-and-Effect: Nothing comes from nothing, or is accidental; all things arise as a result of causes — not one cause, but many; every effect, from smallest to greatest, comes about from a concatenation of causes, working together, at that particular time and place, to produce something unique, as unique as anything and everything is unique. Moreover, we begin to see that we are not alone in this complexity of things; no one is alone, nor ever can be. And, in proportion as we see this to be so, our fears of the sufferings of life and death diminish. Having seen, if only dimly, the relationship between Cause and Effect, we no longer feel powerless in the face of it all, and know that we can do something about it. Such knowledge is liberation, and is of importance not just to oneself, personally, but to the whole world, for we have seen, have we not?, that we are all in the same boat, regardless of race, caste, or creed; we are all friends in suffering; having been born, we face ageing, sickness and death.

In times of trouble, people turn to religion, but often, because of poor understanding, only become further confused thereby. For example, many uninformed Buddhists obviously think that the Buddha is some sort of corrupt official, who they can bribe into answering their prayers: "Hey, Buddha, last week I offered you flowers, fruit and incense, and asked you to help me, but nothing has happened yet! What's the matter? Are you asleep, or on strike, or something?"

Not long ago, I was called upon to visit someone who was in the terminal stages of cancer. When I got to the house and saw him, I could see that he had not long to live. As a result of the devastating chemotherapy he had undergone, he was emaciated, and had only a few wisps of hair on his head. Twice daily, someone from the hospital came to check on his condition and administer medication. Many relatives and friends were gathered there. What could I do, having been summoned? While not holding out any false hopes to him, I tried to cheer and encourage him with Dharma-talk, but alas, it was too late; both he and his family were paralyzed by fear, and could not think clearly. Though they thought of themselves as Buddhists, and had a Buddha-image on the altar, with incense burning before it, they had obviously never bothered to learn anything about the Teachings of the Buddha, and so, when help was available to them, they could not accept or use it.

I asked the man what he thought of his condition, and he replied that if the Buddha would help him, when he recovered, he would become a vegetarian for one month and shave his head. His wife clung onto me, begging me to help her husband. I told her that I had been a regular blood-donor for many years, so there was no need to ask me for help; I would do whatever was within my capacity, without being asked. I also told her that it was a matter of karma, and, while some things might be changed, the causes of other things are so strong that it is very difficult to change them.

The man didn't recover, and died a few days later; but the family didn't contact me or inform me about this; I think they were disappointed with me because I didn't perform the miracle that they were desperately hoping for. So many Buddhists look to the monks for miracles.

During my stays in the Refugee Camps in the Philippines, people would sometimes come to me in the temple and ask me to shave their heads. When I asked why they wanted to do this, they usually answered that, when they were on their fragile boats at sea, in danger of drowning or starving to death, they prayed to the Buddha, and vowed that, if He would help and save them, they would shave their heads; many people also promised to become vegetarians for a month or so. Some kept their promises; others did not.

From where, I wonder, do people get such ideas? If just a few people thought like that, it could be supposed that they had come to the conclusion themselves that the Buddha might be cajoled and influenced into helping them by the offer of shaving their heads or abstaining from eating meat for a while; but this superstition is so widespread that I cannot help thinking that it must somehow be part of their collective Buddhist background. Why should they suppose that shaving their heads has any meritorious significance? If there is any merit in shaving one's head, I should have a mountain of merit, as I shave mine every two weeks! And, if they consider that vegetarianism is the proper thing, then why are they so reluctant to adopt it? Why wait until disaster befalls them before becoming vegetarians? Surely, it would be better to prevent something before it happens, if possible, than to try to correct it after it has hit.

Have you noticed that when people survive a disaster or a dangerous situation — seemingly miraculously — they often attribute their

lucky escape to supernatural intervention, saying such things as : "God saved me; I wouldn't be alive today if He hadn't helped me!" But they are unaware of the implications of such statements: If God really did help and save them, how come He didn't do the same for others who perished? This is a serious stumbling-block for the Believers. I recall stories of missionaries telling Cambodian refugees in their overcrowded Camps in Thailand, that their parents, families, and friends died in Pol Pot's 'Killing Fields' because they didn't believe in Jesus, and that the Buddha was only a man who couldn't save anyone; so they had better accept Jesus, and be saved. Poor refugees — to be insulted with such nonsense after undergoing so much suffering! We cannot blame them for not seeing the glaring flaw in the missionaries' arguments : If Jesus — or God, or whoever else — could save anyone, then why didn't He save the people who Pol Pot's demons tortured and starved to death? In fact, if He is as all-powerful as they claim, then why did He allow the whole thing to happen at all? It is true what the missionaries say about the Buddha — that He was a human being who couldn't save anyone; no one claims that about Him, if they understand what He taught. But is it true what they say about Jesus? What evidence can they show to support their claims — evidence that would stand up in court? It is better to be honest and admit that you don't know, instead of making extravagant claims without evidence to support them; belief is not enough.

It is not my intention to denigrate Jesus, and I don't think I have done so here; it is the claims of His Followers about Him that I question. I have the greatest respect for Jesus, as a Teacher, but I feel sorry that His Teachings — or what remains of them in the Gospels — are not-a-little ambiguous, and were therefore easily bent and twisted to the political purposes of ambitious churchmen into whose hands they later fell. If Jesus could see what they have done with His Teachings, I'm sure He would be shocked!

To return to our question: 'What is the use of following the Way?' Following the Way enables us to lessen the suffering in the world, does it not? Have you not had enough suffering already, without creating more? There is good reason for us to think about this, and to expand our consciousness, not just to think of what we can get out of it, but also of what we can put back in. Do we not get so much out already, without thinking of getting more? Do we live by ourselves alone? Even Robinson Crusoe did not do so, but had his dog, his goats and his chickens, and was

eventually joined by another human being — even though he was of a different race and couldn't speak a word of English! And did Robinson later refuse to be rescued, and choose to remain on his desert island? Or was he not happy to return to his homeland and rejoin his society? Few of us could live alone for long; some of us couldn't even stand a single day of doing so; we prefer the company of others, as we are gregarious by nature, and there are many benefits to be had from living in a community. Imagine how life would be if each one of us had to live separately, and produce by ourselves all the things we need: we wouldn't like it at all, and definitely would not have all the wonderful things that co-operation with others makes possible. It is good for us to ponder on this now and then, as it's so easy to lose sight of it. Ah, but while we benefit in so many ways from living in a community with others, there are also responsibilities, and if we are not prepared to accept the responsibilities, then we are also not entitled to enjoy the benefits; the two go together, inseparably.

To conclude, therefore: When we understand about our relationships with others, it is natural for us to follow the Way, and there is no longer any question about the point of doing so.

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## FACT, NOT FICTION

**SURELY, IF WE ARE TO BE FAIR TO EVERYONE IN THE** world, we must scrap all one-sided systems that favor particular groups, and search in Nature for impartial foundations for our living. The present-day concern over pollution of the environment, and conservation, is a good step in the right direction, since it involves everyone on the Planet; perhaps ecology will be the religion of the future, when people become more and more aware that we share our Good Earth with countless life-forms other than man, and learn to live with them, instead of on them. We have many things to learn from Nature. In our pride and arrogance at being able to walk upright, we have lost our sense of relationship with the rest of Nature, and see ourselves as apart from it; thus, we have tried to master and control Nature, until now, we find ourselves in one hell-of-a-mess! We can understand ourselves only in relation to the Whole of which we are parts, but we have cut ourselves off, and live apart from the rest of existence, so how shall we understand ourselves? We have countless theories and philosophies about life, but if we wish to find out what is true, we must look to Nature, not to Man and his ideas, for Nature has not forgotten what is True.

And Nature is at the heart of Buddhism, not the person of Gotama Buddha. Truth is not a Person or a Being. The Buddha never said things like: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life", but chose to show others the Way to find Truth themselves, so He explained about Life in an impersonal way. He spoke about Three Universal Facts of Life, which no one, who looks impartially and objectively, can deny. Here is a passage from the Pali Canon, entitled: "DHAMMANIYAMA SUTTA" (The Discourse of The Fixed Law of Dharma):

### THUS HAVE I HEARD:

At one time, the Exalted One was staying at Savaithi in Prince Jeta's Grove, in the Park of Anathapindikā. Then the Exalted One spoke thus to the monks: "O monks". Those monks replied to the Exalted One: "Lord". The Exalted One then said: "Monks, whether there is the appearance of Tathagatas or there is not the appearance of Tathagatas, there is this established condition of Dhamma, this fixed Law of Dhamma: All that is Conditioned is Impermanent. That a Tathagata has

fully awakened to, He fully understands. So, awakened and understanding, He announces it, points it out, declares, establishes, expounds, explains and clarifies that: All that is Conditioned is Impermanent.

“Monks, whether there is the appearance of Tathagatas, or there is not the appearance of Tathagatas, there is this established condition of Dhamma, this fixed Law of Dhamma: All that is Conditioned is Dukkha. That a Tathagata has fully awakened to, He fully understands. So, awakened and understanding, He announces it, points it out, declares, establishes, expounds, explains and clarifies that: All that is Conditioned is Dukkha.

“Monks, whether there is the appearance of Tathagatas, or there is not the appearance of Tathagatas, there is this established condition of Dhamma, this fixed Law of Dhamma: All things are Without Self. That a Tathagata has fully awakened to, He fully understands. So, awakened and understanding, He announces it, points it out, declares, establishes, expounds, explains, and clarifies that: All things are Without Self”.

Thus spoke the Exalted One. Delighted, those monks rejoiced in what the Exalted One had said.

(Note: The Buddha used the term ‘Tathagata’ when speaking of Himself; it means: ‘He who has thus come’, or ‘He who has thus gone’.)

These are the Three Universal Facts of Existence. By perceiving and understanding them, Sakyamuni became the Buddha, Enlightened and Free.

#### ANICCA (IMPERMANENCE):

All things, having come into being, move in the direction of dissolution: all meetings end in partings, all building ends in destruction, all birth ends in death.

To cling to that which changes results in pain, anguish, suffering. In all this seemingly-fair show of Earth, there is nothing that will not pass away. In whatever form one might be born, the natural and inevitable result of that birth is death. Even Heaven — and yes, Buddhism talks about Heaven, too — is impermanent. To be reborn in Heaven is regarded

by many as something to be desired, but according to Buddhism, it is little more than a waste of time, for what goes up must come down, and having used up one’s merit — one’s karmic bank balance — in Heaven, one must be reborn lower down, and perhaps lower down than before going to Heaven; and so the whole weary climb has to start all over again. Therefore, the intelligent person uses his opportunities to search for Truth while living in this world; he does not expect to find Truth only in Heaven.

#### DUKKHA (UNSATISFACTORYNESS):

Dukkha — like Anicca and Anatta — is a Pali word, and we will understand it if we know what the Buddha defined it as; He said this: Birth is Dukkha, Old Age is Dukkha, Sickness is Dukkha, Death is Dukkha; Sorrow, Lamentation, Pain and Dejection is Dukkha. Contact with unpleasant things is Dukkha; Separation from pleasant things is Dukkha; not getting what we want is Dukkha; getting what we don’t want is Dukkha. In short, the bodily condition is Dukkha.

He went on to point out the Cause of Dukkha as being the Craving that impels us to rebirth, combined with pleasures and lust, finding pleasure here and there, namely: the Craving for Sensual Pleasure, the Craving for Existence, the Craving for Non-Existence.

Continuing, He taught that it is possible for Dukkha to come to an end, without Craving remaining, in the abandoning, forsaking, release from Craving, in Non-Attachment.

And the Way to this state — which He called Nirvana, and which can be experienced in this life, and not in some far-off, after-death state or place — consists of following the Noble Eightfold Path:

- (1) Right Understanding
- (2) Right Aspirations
- (3) Right Speech
- (4) Right Action
- (5) Right Livelihood
- (6) Right Effort
- (7) Right Awareness
- (8) Right Concentration

This is the Buddha's Way, The Noble Eightfold Path, a Middle Way of Peace, Knowledge, Understanding, Enlightenment.

ANATTA (WITHOUT SELF) :

Nothing exists in and by itself; everything comes into existence, remains a while, and then passes away, according to various factors. Nothing is independent; everything depends upon many things; indeed, if we would look at things clearly, we would see that everything is involved with, and connected to, everything else. This means interdependence, inter-existence, Unity of Life. Brotherhood is therefore not an abstract idea, a far-off dream, but a reality; however, it is a reality that we would usually rather not see, preferring to live in conflict with each other.

The Buddha's Way does not require belief, but only practical and intelligent application; in fact, belief is regarded as an obstacle, and, contrary to what many people think, belief and faith are quite different, for belief exists where there is no knowledge, while faith is born of knowledge applied; it is confidence in something that one has some knowledge and experience of.\*

From this, it can be seen that the Buddha's Way does not center around Him, personally, but around facts that are visible and verifiable. It is a clear, democratic and non-authoritarian Way, a Way that is right HERE and NOW; all that is required is that we walk it!

\* Here is a test whereby you might discern the difference between Belief and Faith: Ask Christians if they believe in Satan, the Devil. They will almost certainly say "Yes". Then ask them if they have faith in Satan. I doubt very much if they will answer affirmatively.

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## FROM BLACK TO WHITE

### ALONG THE WAY, LIFE OFTEN SEEMS TO GROW HEAVIER,

and more difficult 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 is 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.

We can go 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 on 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 might be that element, that factor, that will change, mysteriously, the whole picture; it need not necessarily be something big, dramatic or stupendous, but might be something seemingly trivial; but it will make all the difference, 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 downward-flowing river will not be so rough. We must come to terms with our vulnerability, and stop pretending that we are super-men. As human beings who are — let's admit 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 so bad about it; we are not alone in this. However, we need not remain like this forever, because we can change, and we 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 under a bus, or take an overdose of something or other.

If we become sad, we must 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.

Another thing we should not forget is to stand back occasionally, and take a look at ourselves from a distance, to see ourselves on the stage of Life. Oftentimes, we take ourselves too seriously, and lose perspective. Though 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 to 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 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 untrue; life is never boring, but always new and different. If we examined 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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## FORGIVE YOURSELF

**W**ELABOR AND STAGGER ALONG UNDER THE BURDENS of our sins and mistakes, not knowing how to put them down. Everyone has made mistakes; we have all done things that we should not have done, and have neglected to do things that we should have done. Because of this, we suffer from regret and remorse, and these things follow us like shadows, from the past, to, and through, the present. Although we should feel sorry for our mistakes, life must go on, we must continue on our way, for we cannot live in the past, and any attempt to do so only tears us apart. How can we put down the burdens of the past, and go forward with light hearts?

Many people believe that their sins must be forgiven by a 'God-who-made-everything'; others believe that they must be saved by some 'superman', otherwise they will go to Hell forever. Others see these things, these beliefs, as psychological techniques, from which we can gain the strength to shoulder our responsibilities, accept the consequences of our deeds, and go on living. They are valid as long as they remain techniques, for without them, many would find life too difficult and unbearable, and there would be a much higher suicide-rate than there is at present. But when a technique is not understood for what it is, and becomes an article of belief, an indispensable dogma, then it is a fetter, instead of a means of support. That is why new techniques must constantly be sought, before the old ones become rigid and lifeless.

It seems possible, and maybe even probable that the practice of Confession in the Catholic branch of Christianity, was adopted, in the early Christian era, from Buddhism, along with other things; however, unlike in Buddhism, it has become a dogma with Catholics, and very few understand the real meaning. Most Catholics believe that when they go to confess their sins before the priest, who admonishes them, and perhaps allots some penance to perform, that is the end of it, and they can start again with a clean slate. Protestants — who also do not understand clearly about Confession — ridicule the Catholics for this; in fact, one of the things that caused Martin Luther — the main founder of the Protestant branch of Christianity — to break with the Church of Rome, was the practice of selling certificates of forgiveness. He was not only against the certificates themselves, but against the lucrative business that

they constituted; the rich could afford to pay to have their sins 'absolved' in this way, while the poor could not. The priests claimed that, as the representatives of 'God', they had the capacity and the right to forgive sins — for a price, of course.

How can we buy-off the effects of our sins? No amount of money can do that. But to confess one's sins and mistakes to another person is the first step of coming to grips with them, so that, eventually, by doing as little evil, and as much good as possible, one can overcome them.

Buddhism teaches that we are punished by our sins, not for them, as do other religions; if we sow the seed, and if it germinates and grows, we get the result — not someone else. We do not believe that there is a 'God' or anyone or anything else to reward or punish us; when we understand this, we can do something about our own lives, and can be more in control of the way we live.

Therefore, to whom, or to what, do Buddhists pray? Certainly, we pray to no 'God'; and neither should we pray to the Buddha, for He never asked people to do that, and, in fact, warned against it, telling people to follow the Dharma instead, and thereby find their own enlightenment. The Buddha never claimed to be a savior of any kind; it is the Dharma, the Truth, that saves and liberates us, not the Buddha, or anyone else. When we understand this, we immediately avoid the trap of personalizing things, which is a trap that ensnares many people.

But many people do pray to the Buddha, do they not? Yes, it appears that they do; but, though this might be incorrect, and might impede progress on the Way, it is not necessarily bad. You see, many people have no-one in whom they can confide and tell their troubles to; very few people have what is known, in Buddhist terms, as 'a good friend' (Kalyana-mitta, in Pali language), someone who will listen sympathetically, without condemning, who will help and give constructive advice when necessary. So, without such friends, they keep their feelings and problems bottled up inside, afraid, unable, or unwilling to express them to anyone. Like this, their problems go round and round inside them, causing so much tension and misery, and often growing bigger and stronger, until, somehow, they find ways of 'getting out'. Often, if we cannot release or express our problems ourselves, they accumulate and increase in strength, until, suddenly and uncontrollably, they burst out

like a volcano exploding, and can then be very destructive. We need to find ways to release our problems so that their potential for doing damage is minimized. Therefore, although it is not really correct to pray to the Buddha in a symbol, such as a statue or a picture, it can act as a way of releasing the tensions of accumulated worries and problems, and in this way, as a technique, it can be good. We should not worry about others criticizing us and accusing us of worshipping images — most of them do the same thing, the Christians praying to 'God', which is just their own mental creation and projection, for, although they claim that "God created man in his own image", actually, it is the other way around: Man created God in his own image, due to his hopes, his fears, and his imaginings!

However, while, as a technique for releasing tension, praying to the Buddha is far from being bad, we must beware, and not allow it to become a habit that we get addicted to; it should be resorted to only under conditions of stress, as a man with a broken leg would use a crutch to help him to walk; as far as possible, we should develop self-reliance, understanding that, somehow, whatever we experience is of our own making, and should therefore be accepted for what it is — accepted, examined and assessed to see what can be made of it, and where we can go from there.

If you pray to the Buddha-image, expressing your problems, and asking for help, the image will just sit there, with the eternal smile on its face, saying not a word, moving not a muscle. If you ask for a winning number for the lottery, or help with a job-interview, the Buddha-image will not bend forward and whisper in your ear: "Buy this number ..."; it would never say: "Okay, don't worry; I'll have a word with the boss of the company about you". The answer to your prayers — if there is an answer — must come from yourself, and this largely depends upon how you release yourself, unburden yourself, and express your problems; very often, in the middle of expressing one's problems, one finds the answer for oneself, hand-in-hand with the problem. That is why many teachers — of many subjects — learn from themselves as they teach; the effort to express themselves, and clarify themselves to others, results in further understanding for the teacher, so that he might sometimes catch himself in mid-sentence, and think: "What am I saying? I've said the same thing so many times before, but I never understood it like this until now"!

Therefore, to pray to the Buddha, to talk to the statue — if you have no-one in whom you can confide — may be therapeutic and good. However, remember, the statue is only stone or wood, and the Buddha is not a savior or an information-bureau, but a Teacher who gave practical advice for living; you should, therefore, learn about His Teachings, and try to apply them in your life, so that many problems can be avoided altogether, and the remainder can be approached with wisdom instead of with fear.

To build up a good reputation is not easy, and takes a long time, but to lose it can happen very quickly. Likewise, while it is difficult to undo the effects of a bad deed, those of a good deed can be undone in a moment. Many people go through life arguing and disagreeing with others, and never attempting to resolve the arguments. If we cannot completely avoid arguments and conflicts, we should do our best to resolve them as soon as possible, so that they do not harden and set like concrete; while the concrete is still wet, we can do something to change it, but once it hardens, it is difficult to do so. Jesus advised people to make peace with their adversaries, while they are still in touch with them, and have the opportunity to do so, in case the adversary makes a charge against them, and brings them to court. Because of people's stubbornness and clinging to their positions, many foolish cases are brought to court that could have been — and should have been — easily settled between the conflicting parties themselves; but because of pride and stupidity, neither party is willing to recognize their mistakes. Sometimes, people harbor old grudges for years, unwilling to forgive and forget, thereby burning themselves up. It requires a lot of energy to maintain a conflict, and to hate; is it worth it to destroy oneself? As the Buddha said: "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed"; in those who harbor such thoughts, hatred is not appeased. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me"; in those who harbor not such thoughts, hatred is appeased". Is it not better to let things go, considering that people hurt each other through ignorance and not because they are really bad? Buddhists, especially, should know this, as we learn that everyone has Buddha-nature, and can become enlightened. With Loving-Kindness, we can overcome enmity towards others, rid ourselves of the poison of hate, and draw nearer to Enlightenment. Venerable Narada, in his book, "The Buddha and His Teachings", records that the Buddha, when discoursing on generosity, told Anathapindika (one of His wealthy lay-supporters, the one who presented the Jetavana monastery to Him), that

alms given to the Order of Monks, together with the Buddha, is very meritorious; but more meritorious than such alms is the building of a monastery for the use of the Order; more meritorious than building such monasteries is Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels; more meritorious than Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels is the observance of the Five Precepts; more meritorious than such observance is meditation on Loving-Kindness; and most meritorious of all is the development of Insight into the fleeing nature of things.

Venerable Narada goes on to say: "It is evident from this discourse that generosity is the first stage of the Buddhist way-of-life. More important than generosity is the observance of at least the Five Rules of regulated behavior which tends to the disciplining of words and deeds. Still more important and beneficial is the cultivation of such ennobling virtues like Loving-Kindness which lead to self-development. Most important and most beneficial of all self-discipline is the sincere effort to understand things as they truly are".

To conclude: The overcoming of one's sins and shortcomings begins with recognizing and accepting them, and giving them up; sincere repentance brings relief.

Forgive Yourself... and Go On!

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## THE POWER AND THE GLORY

**QUESTION: HOW COME, IF THE BUDDHA WAS SO POWERFUL, did He suffer from dysentery and die soon afterwards? Should He not have been able to prolong His life indefinitely?"**

**Answer:** There is so much misunderstanding, so much distortion, about the person of the Buddha — as about any great Teacher — about His power, and His capacity to help others, and this misunderstanding inhibits and impedes our efforts to follow the Way. Not surprisingly, soon after the Buddha had passed away and was no longer around to discourage it, the tendency to deify Him set in, and He was transformed from the human teacher that He was, to a 'superman', 'savior-in-the-sky' kind of figure, who is supposed to respond to prayers and supplications, to bless, help, and save, in direct contravention of what He had taught. As time passed, and the movement that He had started spread, His Teachings were modified to make them more acceptable to the masses; perhaps it was felt necessary to do this, or maybe it is natural for it to happen, but we can see now, looking back, that quality was thereby sacrificed to quantity, and the Teachings were diluted, in much the same way as cordial is diluted to make it drinkable; straight from the bottle, it is too strong to drink, so water must be added, but if too much water is added, it loses its flavor. And so, over the ages, things alien to the simple message of the Buddha that each person should work out his/her own salvation, have crept in and many people have accepted them as the authentic Teachings of the Buddha.

Several years ago, I saw a documentary program on TV about a Vietnamese doctor who had recently arrived in Australia, and, finding his qualifications invalid here, was studying to requalify. Due to a number of factors, however — not the least of them being the language, no doubt — he was undergoing some hardship.

The TV camera followed and filmed him in several places, including a temple, where he was shown burning incense before the Buddha-statue. Later, he was asked whether or not he had any feelings of guilt over the fact that he had survived the escape from Vietnam by boat, while so many others had perished in the attempt. He replied that he had such feelings, and added that he thought the Buddha did not give everyone equal chances.

Such thinking — of endowing the Buddha with power to help and to save, to reward or punish, show favoritism or partiality — is quite erroneous. In this particular case, here was a man who could be regarded as highly educated in a specialized area, but who was quite uninformed in another area, an area in which a little bit of time and effort spent investigating would have made things so much clearer.

Today, Philosophy — “the study (or love) of Wisdom”, a most essential quality — is looked upon, by many, as something abstract and obsolete in our practical and so-materialistic world (I recall how I looked upon philosophy-class in high school!). But it is not so, and even though it is not valued by many, it has not lost its importance. Indeed, though many people might not be aware of it, most, if not all of us, do have a philosophy of life of some sort or other — Hedonism, or “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die”, seeming to be the dominant philosophy of great masses of people today, or “I’m alright, mate; I don’t care about you”. And even a thief has a philosophy: “Steal, and grow rich, without working for it” (and not a few of our prominent leaders and politicians seem to subscribe to *that* philosophy!). But whether such thinking deserves the name of philosophy is rather debatable...

In treating a sickness, a doctor has first to acknowledge its existence, then analyze and diagnose it; only then can he begin to treat it effectively. It would be a waste of time for him to complain that life is not fair, and doesn’t give people equal chances, because we can all see the manifold inequalities of life around — rich and poor, high and low, sickly and healthy, beautiful and ugly, intelligent and dull, etc., and all the gradations in between — even though the causes of such are obscure. They are facts, and if we are to deal with them at all, this is where we must begin, and not by wishing them to be otherwise, or by blaming someone or something else.

The Buddha does not come into the picture here, for He is not responsible for what happens to us, and He should not be praised, blamed, or implicated in any way. According to the records we have of His Teachings, He said that each one of us has his or her own individual karma, meaning that, somehow, whatever we experience, is of our own making, directly or indirectly; and, like an airplane ticket issued under one’s name, is non-transferable. Our present situation, therefore, whatever it is, and whether we like it or not, should be accepted for what it

is, and assessed, to see what can be made of it, and where we can go from here. If it is unpleasant, it should be examined to discover — if possible — its main causes, causes which it would be wise to avoid repeating in the future. If it is pleasant, then its causes should be ascertained, for possible reproduction of the same effect. In any case, praise or blame of another for whatever happens to us is not in order; we should accept, assess, and go on. But acceptance, here, in no way implies complacency or resignation to ‘Fate’, for we can work to change and overcome the things we dislike, by first accepting them as they are. It is an approach like that of a doctor when dealing with disease, and this is why the Buddha is sometimes known as “The Great Physician”; He formulated His Four Noble Truths as a doctor would diagnose and prescribe treatment for a disease.

Now, to return to the question: “If the Buddha was so powerful...?” Well, in what way was the Buddha powerful, and how did He get His power? His was the power of Wisdom or Knowledge about the basic nature of life, and it came to Him with His Enlightenment under the Bodhi-tree. At first, He thought that what He had found was so profound that if He tried to explain it to people who were deeply entangled in the emotional problems of life, no-one would understand, and it would only be troublesome for Himself; so He decided to remain in the forest, living alone and enjoying the bliss of enlightenment, until He passed away. But the books say that, as He was thinking so, a voice spoke to Him, and some say that it came from outside Him, while others say it came from within Him; we cannot say for sure where it came from, and it doesn’t really matter, anyway, but it said: “There are a few people with just a little dust of Ignorance in their eyes. If they hear the Dharma, they will understand, but not hearing it, they will fall away”. This persuaded the Buddha to leave His peaceful forest, and go out into the world to teach.

During His long ministry of 45 years, He must have met many thousands of people, but we should not think that all those who had the good fortune to meet the Buddha became enlightened thereby, for even with His great wisdom, by which He could perceive people’s capacity to understand, and to teach them accordingly, His power was still limited, and He was not able to help everyone, as some people mistakenly think. In those days, we must realize, there were few forms of entertainment, and the visit of a wandering teacher to a village or a town was quite an event, providing a diversion from the everyday life of work, eat, and

sleep, and people would go to see such teachers — then, as now — with different motives. Some would go because they had nothing else to do, or to accompany their family or friends; some would go to see something unusual, maybe with the hope of seeing miracles performed; some would go to make offerings and acquire merit thereby; some would even go to heckle or debate, or to compare their knowledge with that of the teacher; and others, always only few in number, would go with the sincere desire to learn something, and to be uplifted. But we can be sure that not everyone became enlightened from meeting the Buddha; even in the presence of a Buddha, it is not so easy to become enlightened, as the story of the Buddha's favorite disciple and personal attendant, Ananda, illustrates.

It is said that Ananda, who was also of royal blood, was born on the same day as his cousin, Prince Siddhartha, with whom he grew up in the palace, and after Siddhartha's enlightenment, Ananda also became a monk. And so, when the Buddha was about to pass away at the age of 80, Ananda was also an old man. But, although he had heard the Buddha preach and teach so many times, and although he had an extremely retentive memory, he was still not yet enlightened, and as the Buddha lay there on His death-bed, Ananda was overcome by grief and went aside to weep. The Buddha summoned him, and consoled him, saying: "Enough, Ananda, do not weep, do not grieve, for have I not told you, so many times and in so many ways, that all that is born must die? How can it be otherwise that this body of mine, having been born, should not die? It is in the nature of things that, having come into being, they age, decay, and pass away. All things are impermanent. Work out your own salvation with diligence". And with those words, He passed away.

From this example, we can see that mere intellectual understanding does not produce enlightenment. We can easily understand, intellectually, that everything that is born must die; there is no mystery in this. But we do not perceive it intuitively, by wisdom, and so it does not have a deep and transforming effect upon us, and therefore we continue to look for teachers to impart secret and esoteric knowledge to us, until, finally, we must return to ourselves to find what, in one way, we have always known, but never really understood.

So, back, once more, and finally, to the question that started all this: We really must examine the question, for, as with many questions, we

might find the answer contained therein. Or, we might find, as in the case of this question, it has no meaning. How come? Well, to talk of the birth or the death of a Buddha is a contradiction of terms, because a Buddha is not born, and so he does not/cannot die. A play on words? No, a clarification, and one that makes a great deal of difference. The person who was born in Lumbini Gardens (the spot there is still marked by a pillar erected by the Emperor Ashoka two-and-a-half centuries later), in Northern India, was a Prince by the name of Siddhartha Gotama, the son of a provincial ruler. Buddhists say that, at this time, he was a 'Bodhisattva', which is a Sanskrit word meaning 'an aspirant to Buddhahood'; he was not yet fully enlightened, and so was not a Buddha; therefore, it is inappropriate to talk of 'the birth of the Buddha'. He became a Buddha upon His Enlightenment at the age of 35, enlightenment being a state-of-mind, as is happiness or sadness; it is not a physical condition.

Now, what is born must die; what is not born cannot die. The body of the Buddha was born, so naturally, it died, like every other body has or will. But the Buddha, having reached the Deathless state of Nirvana, did not die. So the question: "If the Buddha was so powerful, why did He die?" simply does not arise.

We must be careful not to think of the Buddha as being omniscient or all-powerful, because He was not so; that is just our projection, our supposition, belief, or wishful thinking. If the power of the Buddha's wisdom, love, and compassion could protect us from sickness and misfortune, we would all be eternally healthy and happy; but it is inadvisable to depend upon the goodwill of the Buddha, or of any one else; His body, like ours, was subject to natural laws, was it not? Instead of praying and hoping that He will help us, we should follow His last advice, and "Work out your own salvation, with diligence"!

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## MAHAYANA AND HINAYANA

THESE ARE TWO BUDDHIST TERMS — MAHAYANA AND HINAYANA — that are misunderstood by many Buddhists, and much confusion arises because of this. I would like to present a different way of looking at them.

They concern the Buddhist approach to life. 'Mahayana' means, literally, 'The Great Vehicle' (of Salvation), something like a jumbo-jet, which can carry many people. 'Hinayana' is a derogatory term meaning 'Small Vehicle' or 'Inferior Vehicle' (like a bicycle, which can carry only one person), used by people who claim they follow the 'Mahayana' to refer to followers of the 'Theravada school', or 'Way of the Elders'; as if they themselves have already passed that stage, they say that 'Hinayanists' are selfish, thinking only of their own salvation, instead of — like them — the salvation of 'all beings'. There is tremendous egoism underlying such a claim. Actually, the word 'Hinayana' is a misnomer, and should not be used at all, to refer to people, for both 'Mahayana' and 'Hinayana', as I will show, are attitudes of mind.

Nowadays, because Buddhism, in general, is not much more than a thing of tradition, 'Mahayana' has degenerated into a system of worship and prayer to numerous Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that hope, fear, and superstition has populated the cosmos with. Ignorant of the Buddha's Teachings about the Law of Karma, and the importance of using the Dharma to develop spiritual self-reliance, people weak-mindedly turn for help and salvation to celestial beings; to them, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are remote from them — somewhere in the sky, perhaps — similar to the deities of other religions. And so, they miss the whole point of the Buddha's parting injunction: "Work out your own salvation with diligence", Enlightenment being an inner experience, not something that comes to us from outside.

The Bodhisattva-ideal is acknowledged by all Buddhists, regardless of the sect or school that they adhere to, as being the highest path, for it is the way of the candidate for Buddhahood. Upon reaching his goal, and becoming a Buddha, he then has the capacity to help others to reach Enlightenment (not to forgive their sins and save them, but more in the sense of a school-teacher instructing his pupils, and helping them

wherever possible so that they might pass their exams and graduate; he cannot pass the exams for them). When a Bodhisattva reaches Enlightenment, he is a Bodhisattva no longer, but a fully-fledged Buddha. While he is a Bodhisattva, as in the case of Prince Siddhartha until he was 35 years old, he is not yet fully-enlightened. Now, an Arahant is one who, through following the Dharma of a Buddha, reaches Enlightenment, and the Enlightenment, or Nirvana, that he reaches is the same as that of a Buddha (Nirvana being unconditioned, and without grades or divisions), but he has not the capacity of a Buddha to assist others; his capacity is limited. A Buddha is an Arahant, too, but an Arahant is not a Buddha, just as a doctor is a man (or woman), but not every man or woman is a doctor. Both Buddha and Arahant are free from the chains of Samsara (phenomenal existence); they no longer have a sense of separateness and selfishness.

Mahayana, far from being a way of petition and prayer for help from superior or celestial beings, is a way of tremendous self-exertion; a person following that way does not pray to the Buddha or Bodhisattvas, but, by using the Dharma, strives to become a Bodhisattva — and ultimately, a Buddha — himself. He does this, not by rejecting the world, but by understanding that he is the world, and that he does not — cannot — live by and for himself alone; his self-interest and fear for himself diminishes in direct proportion as to how much he sees himself as others, just as a sense of separateness and ego increases the fear for, and the pain of the self.

For the sake of explanation, let us say that there are 3 kinds of people in the world: (1) Blind people; (2) Selfish people; and (3) Selfless people. Blind people wander aimlessly through life, knowing and caring nothing about the Dharma, infatuated with themselves, but acting in ways that are inimical to themselves and that only result in suffering; they think they love themselves, but actually do not. They are not bad, or selfish, but foolish; selfishness is something above and beyond them, for selfish people know, at least, how to take care of themselves, while blind and foolish people do not, and only hurt themselves. There are so many blind people, and the world is sinking beneath their weight. If they could wake up, they would change their ways.

The Selfish people are those who have seen something of the Dharma, and who try to live in accordance with what they've seen. But

their insight is not great, and they are motivated by self-interest; though they would try not to hurt anyone, and to do what is right and good, they do so either because of fear of suffering, or from desire for gain — materially and/or spiritually. But if the world had more people of this kind, it would be a much better place to live in, for real selfish people do not kill, steal, lie, cheat, start and perpetuate wars, etc.; it is the foolish people who do such things. The abstention from evil, and the goodness of the selfish people, though motivated by thoughts of self, benefits the world in many ways, and though, like the bud of a flower, the goodness at this level is not yet full or complete, it is a necessary stage of the Path; we must begin with self in order to understand and go beyond it. Of course, selfishness here is not selfishness as it is generally understood — as something negative and anti-social — not at all! This kind of selfishness recognizes others, and feels for them, even though it puts itself first. We can call this the 'Hinayana stage', and it is not to be looked down upon by anyone, but respected and praised; it is already a high level. Usually, we find that people who claim to be 'Mahayanists', and who look down on others they consider to be 'Hinayanists', have got little more than these silly and empty names.

Going beyond self, to the third stage — that of Mahayana — is accomplished through understanding, clearly, that we do not live alone, by and for ourselves, that life is a Whole, with many parts, like a multifaceted diamond; we are not separate and alone, but inter-exist with all forms of life, and where, before, we were motivated by thoughts of self — fear of suffering, old age, death, of not attaining enlightenment, and of therefore spinning round and round in Samsara indefinitely — now, through insight, we have power over the vicissitudes of life; we see that most of our suffering comes from our own ignorance and stupidity, and is therefore unnecessary — a discovery of tremendous import to the world! Instead of looking for the causes of our problems outside of ourselves, we find them inside! And it is now within our capacity to communicate this to others who might be ready for it, to shout it from the rooftops, to proclaim to others that the only chains that bind us are of our own forging. This — and not a Buddhist sect, or thinking with a separatist mind — is Mahayana; it is the essence of Enlightenment, and is available to all.

We can follow the Mahayana, but nobody with any modesty would say that he does so; indeed, he would probably not be aware of it, and

might even deny it! Burningspots on one's head, and taking 'Bodhisattva-preccepts' do not make one into a Bodhisattva; it is not so easy as that. And there are no outward signs by which a Bodhisattva might be recognized; certainly, he would not float around on a lotus-flower, as depicted in popular Buddhist art. If a Bodhisattva can help someone, he will help; it is not necessary to pray to him/her; it is only necessary to put oneself in a position where one can be helped, by first helping others, because if one does not prepare oneself in this way, one will have no foundation for receiving help from another. We must first give out before we can receive, sow the seeds before reaping the harvest. This is obvious to anyone, is it not?

To conclude: Mahayana and Hinayana are attitudes of mind, or levels of consciousness, not sects or schools of Buddhism.

After-thought: Did Sakyamuni pray, or receive help from anyone or anything when He was sitting under the Bodhi-Tree?

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## PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN WAR

**D**URING THE POPE'S VISIT TO INDONESIA IN OCT. '89, HE denounced that country's birth-control program, though why he should try to interfere with something not only important, but absolutely essential, I just can't imagine; it is certainly a great impertinence. Indonesia has a population of about 180 million, most of whom are Muslims. The government there has had remarkable results with its birth-control program in the last decade, and deserves praise, not condemnation for this.

The world population is now about 5.5 billion — that is, 5,500,000,000 — and is increasing rapidly. In spite of the affluence of the developed countries, in poor countries like Ethiopia and Somalia — to name the most outstanding examples — famine and starvation cast their shadows over millions of people; in spite of this, however, people there continue to procreate uncontrollably, though this is probably the blind urge of Nature to ensure the survival of the species.

A Canadian environmental expert who recently visited Australia said that any solutions to the global environmental problems must be carried out coincidentally with drastic population control and reduction. According to him, the birth of each extra person in an industrialized country is more disastrous than the birth of 50 people in undeveloped countries like Bangladesh, for example, as it is people in the industrialized countries who produce the bulk of the carbon-dioxide and CFC's that are causing the Greenhouse Effect and the depletion of the Ozone Layer.

Over-population causes misery in many forms: starvation, a high infant-mortality rate, crime, deforestation, pollution, land-degradation, and war. Whoever opposes birth-control unspokenly stands for war, for war is one of the outcomes of over-population. We have only to look back through history to see what happens when a country's population becomes too big to be supported by that country: people will not just lie down and die of starvation if they can see plenty and to spare in the next country's fields, will they? We can also see it in the animal world, with rabbits, mice and locusts as examples. Those animals know nothing about contraception, and look what happens with them!

The Pope's stand against birth-control is a classic example of how Christianity, in particular, has opposed Science — not just Science, but Common Sense — through the ages. What reason can he have for behaving in such an irrational and irresponsible manner? We are not talking here about Abortion, which any Buddhist, Hindu or Jain would also oppose, as abortion is murder, for life begins at the moment of conception, when the three essential elements of sperm, ovum and the incoming consciousness come together. No, birth-control is merely a matter of preventing the three elements from coming together and conception taking place; there is no killing involved. And today, there are various forms of contraception available to almost anyone, and so governments can afford — must afford — to carry out birth-control programs; the costs are minimal compared with the alternative results of overpopulation.

Perhaps the Pope is harking back to the time in the Bible, when 'God' said to 'Adam and Eve' (Genesis 1:28) : "Be fruitful, and multiply". Well, in the early days of man's history, prolific reproduction was a necessity, as mortality rates were very high and length of life short; but that is hardly so today, and in fact, the opposite is needed: not multiply, but decrease. Exhortations like that must be understood in context, and not applied for all eternity. But, if this is the Pope's reason for opposing birth-control, why is he himself celibate? I can think of no passage in the New Testament where Jesus spoke directly about celibacy, or encouraged it, let alone made it a rule for his disciples. So where the Catholic Church got the priestly practice of celibacy from, I'm not sure. The Jews never practiced celibacy, but maybe this is one of the many influences of Indian thought on early Christianity. Incidentally, some of the Popes were not celibate, but openly had wives and children.

It is fortunate that the Popes of our time do not have the power over people's lives that they once had, for now many Catholics pay no heed to the Church's ideas about birth-control, and it is to be hoped that more of them will listen to the Voice of Reason instead of to the Voice of Dogma. Now is a time when it is imperative to face facts if the human race is not going to annihilate itself, or devolve to an inferior condition. We can no longer insulate ourselves in ignorance and superstition, but must see how we — each one of us — contribute to the problems facing the Whole of Humanity, for the Whole is made up of parts, and the parts are people — voracious, waste-producing, pollution-causing people,

like you and I. We are responsible, and must accept responsibility before it's too late to do anything. We do not live alone in the world; the world is not our personal property, but belongs to us all — for a while; we share it with others now, and will pass it on to those who will come after us. Is it not in our own interests to think about things, and take care of them?

Albert Einstein wrote: "The religion of the future will be a Cosmic Religion. It should transcend a Personal God, and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the Natural and the Spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense of all things, Natural and Spiritual, as a meaningful Unity".

Nowadays, people are becoming aware that this Earth of ours functions as a Whole, and is affected by all the living things on it — especially by human beings, because of their propensity for destruction. Until recently, few people cared about pollution, deforestation, or the slaughter of wildlife — to the point of extinction, in many cases. But now, faced with the reality that we are all — you and I — directly involved in what is happening, people are beginning to awake from their apathy. However, it will take a great deal more to keep them awake and inspire them to participate in doing something positive to counter the effects of centuries of neglect and exploitation. Now, we must see beyond the narrow barriers that we have created, must understand the 'human-ness' that we have in common with others, must move towards the 'Cosmic Religion' that Einstein envisaged; it is imperative to do so!

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## I, ME, MINE

### BECAUSE I SPEAK AND WRITE ABOUT THE BUDDHIST

Concept of Selflessness, or No-Self, someone recently asked me if I live according to this concept that 'there is no self'.

Before I answer that, we must first discuss, briefly, what this concept means. You see, at the time of the Buddha, just like today, many people believed that each person had a separate, personal, immortal and unchanging spirit, or soul; the Indians called this 'Atma', or Self. Upon His Enlightenment, however, the Buddha saw that nowhere is there anything permanent, separate or immortal that could be grasped onto, and claimed as 'I', 'me', or 'mine'; nothing exists in and by itself, but is dependent upon many things for its existence. Life, He said, is a process; we come into being, remain a while, then pass away, changing all the time. He 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. Unfortunately, the development of Western Science from such foundations was 'nipped in the bud' with the advent of Christianity, and had to remain 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 people, as it seems to take away every reason for living. "What, 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 nihilistic, but really, it is not so. According to my personal experience, it is a way to live — not merely to believe — because only by applying the Teachings of the Buddha shall we know for ourselves the truth and validity of them. Those who have experienced the truth of No-Self know that 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, me, mine'. And even if a person only glimpses it, and then falls back from his brief illumination, he knows, ever-after, 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 confidence



cannot be shaken. Gone, forever, is the belief in a separate, personal, immortal soul. Yet, unless that person has attained complete enlightenment, he still acts in selfish ways; this, however, is due to the force of ingrained and deep-rooted habit, and not from belief in a separate soul. Moreover, since no-one can live another person's life for him, each person has to think of, and take care of himself.

A person does not become enlightened merely by thinking or talking about enlightenment, by wishing to be enlightened, or even by trying to become enlightened, for enlightenment is not ours to control. Enlightenment takes place when we have prepared ourselves, and are ready for it, open, empty, and sensitive, and arises unexpectedly when we are not thinking of it, when there is no thought of self 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! I understand!"

Now, in order to allay fears of personal annihilation, we should recall the Buddha's immediate disciples: upon their enlightenment, they didn't lose their identities, and became indistinguishable from each other, like photo-copies, nor were they known thereafter as A, B, C, or 1, 2, 3. They retained their identities, and individual characteristics — Ananda, the Buddha's personal attendant and favorite disciple being renowned for his extremely retentive memory, Sariputra famed for his wisdom, Moggallana being foremost in psychic-powers, and so on. Enlightenment does not 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.

Now, 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 — something 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 certainty, 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 just disappear by pretending that it is not there; in fact, it is strengthened thereby. We cannot overcome ego completely; only Full Enlightenment can do that. However, even though we might 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 other people, we can strive to replace ego 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 so difficult to admit our mistakes and apologize for them, preferring, instead, to attempt to cover them up with excuses and further mistakes, and becoming swallowed by the game of "The Great Pretense", from which it is so hard to extricate ourselves.

And this business about 'face': it's 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 an ego, just like you; how could it be that I should have no ego when I am this side of enlightenment? Why deny it? However, I have learned that ego should often be put aside, and I am prepared to try to do this. Many people, I'm sure, would say that 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 an 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 or follow me, but to listen — yes, I ask people to listen — to what I say, to listen, think clearly, and to decide for themselves whether what I say is true and useful to them, or not. I am not a savior or a superman, and do not claim to be; the Buddha told, very clearly, that we must each save

ourselves, that no one can save another. Nor do I have disciples; 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 — 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 or car?" He probably has some psychic power — as did the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta — but that does not mean that he is enlightened; we should not be so gullible!

There are few really-enlightened people in the World today, it would seem — perhaps it is always so — and if we go around searching for an enlightened person to save us, we will probably be quite disappointed. Someone wrote to me recently, lamenting the fact that her ill-health prevented her from attending Dharma-talks by famous teachers. I tried to explain to her that she should not feel so bad about this, because what, after all, did she expect to hear from those teachers that she did not 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 other things 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 — then 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, then one knows that insight and enlightenment can arise anywhere, anytime, and not just during a Dharma-talk.

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## OLD BONES

**T**HERE IS A VERY URGENT NEED TO BALANCE THE inner and the outer life, for many of our present-day problems exist because of our failure to achieve a balance. Externally — that is, technologically and materially — we have made great progress within the last few centuries, and especially in the present century, but psychologically, we have not kept up; indeed, many of us are still living in caves, mentally, even while our bodies repose comfortably in fine houses; this dichotomy, of course, is productive of trouble.

Unless we are to be hopelessly impractical, and discard the comforts and luxuries of modern life, we must bring our minds up-to-date, through understanding — and through living according to such understanding — how we interexist and depend upon others. If we cannot, or will not do this, we shall always be torn between two worlds — the old and the new, the primitive and the modern. The greatest obstacle to this necessary adjustment is — believe it or not — belief. Belief binds men's minds more firmly than the strongest chains may bind their bodies. Most people are prisoners of belief, in one form or another, and even disbelievers are prisoners of it — the very fact that they proclaim their disbelief so loudly proves this, for Disbelief is just the reverse side of Belief. If we are to see things clearly, we must put aside both Belief and Disbelief, as they are both subjective, and cloud our understanding.

Some people, trying to live by old standards that seem to them to have worked in the past, reject modernity and its products, but this is not realistic. What we need is a way, a philosophical approach, that will allow us to live by time-tested codes and standards in the present. Is there such a way in the world? In order to find out, we must examine the histories and structures of religions and philosophies, not merely believe; if we do so, perhaps we will find that some of them are just facades, or things fit only for books on mythology and fairy-tales.

You can give a dog fleshless bones, and, for a time, it will be happy, but not forever.

Religions, throughout the ages, have offered palliatives to people for their sorrows, and hope concerning life-after-death. But many of the things they have offered are 'fleshless bones' — things impossible to verify, things depending upon mere belief. Is your religion — the religion that you have inherited from others, the religion that you have accepted without question, or the religion that you have — in some cases — chosen for yourself, for whatever reason — is your religion a collection of fleshless bones, an old skeleton, or is it something alive and dynamic? Ask yourself this question, honestly and fearlessly: "What does my religion offer me?" Does it offer only outmoded explanations and unreasonable dogmas? Does it provide you with a world-view consistent with present and ever-changing conditions? Does it help you to maintain your sanity in this insane world which is rushing headlong to destruction? Does it help you to see unity in diversity? Does it help you to feel part of things, even if you are only a small part among many others? Does it describe your place among, and relationship to all other forms of life? Does it inform you of your importance, or does it grind you down into servility and insignificance?

When all that they can throw at you are promises of salvation and life-in-heaven on the other side of death if you believe them, and threats of hell for disbelieving — but nothing to live on now — this is a sign that they are spiritually bankrupt, but are pretending and trying to conceal the fact. How long are you going to be tricked by these charlatans? They are cheaters disguised as teachers.

The crux of the matter is fear; we are afraid to die, and even afraid to live. If we found meaning in our lives, and if our lives were not so empty and shallow, then fear of living and dying, and of what happens after death, would disappear; we would need no motive for living well in the Here-and-Now, but would do what needs to be done without worrying about results; like when we go to work: we go to work in order to earn money, but we do not sit down and worry — from the time we go to work on Monday morning, until we finish on Friday afternoon — about whether we shall be paid or not, do we? If we did so, we would very soon be out of a job, and certainly would not get paid! We work, confident that at the end of the week, or month, we'll be paid; our habit of buying things on credit shows that we are confident about being paid for our work.

We should be honest about life, and life will be honest with us. This is not a game without rules; it has rules, and the sooner we learn them, the sooner we shall be able to play the game without continually losing.

For many people, to abandon belief would be to lose everything; it would be inconceivable to them. On the other hand, there are many people who have abandoned belief, but not completely, and so are still unable to see. Is it possible to live without belief regarding life-after-death, heaven, hell, etc.? Is it possible to listen to others — teachers, preachers, parents, leaders, etc. — without belief, so that one is able to discover, for oneself, whether what they say is true and useful, or not? I would say, without hesitation, "Yes, it is!" But do not believe me; try it for yourself, and see!

**Why be content with old bones? Demand reality, fiercely, NOW!!!**

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## DISCOVERY

**DURING 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 gradually coalesced. This was a tremendous mental step forward, and — needless to say — it was vehemently opposed by the ecclesiastical authorities, whose power-base was 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 coming to realize that the Earth and everything on/in 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 to us 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, of course, as parts, belong to the Whole — not in a Stalinist sort of way, wherein the parts exist for the Whole, and are regarded as expendable and to be subjugated, but because the Whole cannot exist without the parts.

We are living in a tremendously 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, and the possibility, at last, of a union of Science and Religion. Now 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.

In the so-called 'developed' world, we have reached a standard of living hitherto unknown in history. It didn't just happen to us overnight

as the results of three wishes granted us by some 'genie-in-a-jar', however, but 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 have not been able to make the necessary mental 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 now, when our fragile and vulnerable oil-based economy begins to tremble, we become scared and wonder what will happen; 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, or are deaf, do not care, or simply enjoy the tragic-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 until the rain comes before fixing them. Likewise, a time of peace is a time to prepare for unpeace — not by stockpiling weapons and building fall-out shelters, but for moral-reattachment: developing our inner resources and defenses. How might this be done? By understanding something of the nature of life as it is, not 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 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 that happened to us, maybe we could put it like that, 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 veritable finger-snap in the life of the Universe! — we were living in caves, with no written language, and no technology beyond the ability to use fire and to chip flint into crude weapons and tools. Our ancestors suffered and died, but each generation passed something on to the one that succeeded

it, 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 bequeathed 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 the Second World War, apart from numerous regional conflicts, we have had a period of comparative peace, but it has been a very tense peace, like a drawn bow (actually, the Second World War never 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 T.B., we have either 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 Alzheimer's, Parkinson's or stroke, mental diseases like schizophrenia, manic-depression, drug-addiction. And another one, which should go in the latter category and be treated as a disease — as it is certainly a dis-ease — is Boredom, for it leaves people feeling listless, worthless, devoid of a sense of hope, purpose or direction in life, and leads to all kinds of mischief, crime, destructiveness, and often, to suicide.

It is very sad to so often hear people these days complain of being bored, and of having 'nothing to do' — these days, when there are 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 this, it seems, is a distinct possibility with the current crisis in the Middle-East (and, if we are lucky, and this one passes, doubtless there will be others) - 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!

But 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!

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 does 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 people think that, just because the Earth has been charted and mapped-out, the Great Age of Discovery is over, and they must resign themselves 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!

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## THE SWASTIKA

**T**OO LONG HAVE I WAITED TO WRITE ABOUT SOMETHING that should have been explained long before; had I written earlier, some trouble could perhaps have been averted. However, it is 'better late than not at all', and I write these words now in the hope that they will obviate more trouble in the future.

If we begin to examine our lives, we will soon see how much we live by symbols, and symbols are not real things in themselves, but only indicative of something else. Take money, for example, the most obvious symbol in our lives: it is a symbol of wealth, a token of exchange; but, in itself it is not worth much. How often has it happened that a government has suddenly devalued its currency, and, overnight, the currency becomes much-reduced in value, or even worthless! While it has value, we use it as a means of exchange to buy things with; but what happens if there is a famine, and there is no food available — can we eat money?

All kinds of crimes — and the worst crime of all: War — have been committed because of symbols. The Communists carry their Hammer-and-Sickle flag into battle with them, just as the Christians carried the Cross in their 'Holy Wars'. (Fortunately, Buddhists have never debased their religion by carrying symbols of it — a Lotus, Wheel, or Swastika, etc. — into battle; whereas Buddhists have fought wars, they never did so as Buddhists, but as members of a nation or other group; there has never been a Buddhist war, and hopefully never will be; indeed, it is hard to imagine how a war could be carried out in the name of Buddhism, the first principle of which is reverence for life).

Words are symbols, and not the things that they represent. All words are adjectives, no matter whether we call them nouns, verbs, or whatever; an adjective is a describing-word, but it is not the thing described.

The Buddha-image is a symbol; its purpose is to remind us of the wise and compassionate Teacher who lived so long ago, and who gave us good advice to live by. Who treats the statues as living things, mistaking the symbol for the symbolized? Who, for a moment, imagines

that this Teacher, who was born a Prince, but gave up all his worldly wealth and position to become a homeless wanderer, and finally an Enlightened One, really looked like the statues that we have made to represent Him? How would you feel if you saw a person looking like the Buddha-statues on the street today — with a lump on his head, long ears touching his shoulders, hair curled into tight little knots like snails, and the other signs that are supposed to be the distinguishing marks of a superman, according to the books? Would you not feel rather surprised? Some people, without a doubt, would think they were seeing an extra-terrestrial being! Here, by speaking thus, I am not intending to be — and hope I do not appear to be — sacrilegious, but am merely trying to indicate how we get stuck on symbols, and never see beyond.

In 1986, I went to visit Vietnamese refugees in Norway. While there, I was told of something unfortunate that had happened previously, something that, with a little foresight, could have been avoided. One of the Vietnamese Buddhists had died, and on the stone to mark his grave, his family had engraved a Swastika sign. Now, the Swastika, to Vietnamese Buddhists - as it is to people of various religions in Asia — is an auspicious symbol — why else would these people have placed it on the tombstone, and why do many Asian Buddhists wear small gold swastikas around their necks, or have it tattooed on their arms? Having inquired of a number of people wearing this symbol, however, as to its meaning, I discovered that not many knew. Well, according to one account that I came across, this symbol originated in ancient Persia, about 3,500 years ago; it therefore predated Buddhism by 1,000 years, and, whichever way it is used in Asia — either ☸ or ☹ — it symbolizes Safety, Well-Being and Happiness.

However, while in the East, the Swastika always symbolizes something good, in the West, it has come to be a symbol of evil because of its adoption by Adolf Hitler. Very few Westerners know of its Asian and ancient origin.

Norway, like many other European countries, suffered under the occupying forces of Nazi Germany during the Second World War, so, when some Norwegians saw the Swastika sign on the Vietnamese tombstone in a public cemetery, the memories of Nazi terror rushed to the surface, and there was a furor. At first, the Vietnamese did not know what all the fuss was about, as they say that the way the Buddhists use

the Swastika — ☸ — is different than the way Hitler used it — ☹ —. Well, this might be so to them, but I'm sure that most Westerners don't know the difference, and so it was in Norway. Antagonism flared, and the Vietnamese had to make a public explanation and apology, and remove the mark from the tombstone.

In the U.S., I know that there have been other incidents regarding this symbol, and therefore, because I do not want to see the Vietnamese Buddhists in trouble or danger, I have tried to explain, on different occasions, that it is advisable not to use this symbol anymore, as it only causes confusion and misunderstanding.

After all, it is not the only symbol that Buddhists have to use; we have the Lotus, or the Dharma-Wheel; we should be practical in this, as in all matters. It would be impossible to explain to everyone, so that they understood, that the Buddhist Swastika is different from the Nazi Swastika — impossible! And not only might the use of it cause trouble, but it can only impede our efforts to propagate the Dharma in the West; some people, who might otherwise be sympathetic towards Buddhism, would feel alienated by the presence of Swastika signs in the temples.

Therefore, it is we who must understand, bend and adapt on this point. If the Vietnamese Buddhists continue to use this symbol, they are only inviting trouble, and have only themselves to blame for the consequences. This is my well-meant advice to you, meant to preserve, not to destroy, to bring about a little of the quality that the Swastika symbolizes: Safety and Well-Being.

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## PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

**QUESTION:** "WHY IS THERE SO MUCH PREJUDICE IN THE world? Is there anything we can do about it?"

**Answer:** This is a good question, one that concerns us all, and one that we can all benefit from thinking about.

Surely, we have all been victims of prejudice at one time or another, either of racial prejudice, religious prejudice, sexual prejudice, prejudice because of our accent, the clothes we wear, and so on; it has so many forms, and has been going on for as long as people have been people, and, since an end to it is hard to imagine, we had better get used to its presence, and try to understand it.

Before we can begin to tackle the problems facing us, we must first identify their causes. Etymologically, the word prejudice means 'before judgment' (pre=before, judge=judgment or judging), or 'judging before being in possession of all the facts involved'. If therefore comes from incomplete or biased understanding, or, to put it another way, from our eternal enemy: Ignorance. We are all guilty of it, at times, by reason of our conditioning, and the preferences that arise therefrom; it is not just something outside of ourselves, something that we see and condemn in others; it is in us, too.

Prejudice is often confused with discrimination, and we hear people speak about 'racial discrimination' as something negative or bad. But discrimination forms such a necessary part of our lives that we would be unable to function without it, and would die. Imagine not being able to distinguish — for this is what discrimination is: the ability to discern or distinguish things from each other, nothing else — between a red light and a green light; there would be pile-ups, death and mutilation at every intersection! How would food taste if we could not distinguish between salt and sugar? To clarify the difference between prejudice and discrimination is itself discrimination! It is a very important aspect of our intellect. It also enables us to recognize the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, and is, therefore, responsible for our concepts of morality and immorality, which couldn't exist without it. Morality consists of our ability to choose, and decide to refrain from doing certain



things which are regarded as harmful, antisocial, or 'bad', and to perform other deeds which are considered to be helpful, useful, or 'good'. Animals live by instinct, instead of by choice, and so cannot be regarded as 'moral' or 'immoral' (we don't consider dogs immoral because they don't wear clothes, but would not think the same way about people if they went around naked). But human beings, on a higher level, have the capacity to choose, and constantly have to make decisions. We all have the capacity to kill, steal, lie, cheat, destroy, etc., but our sense of discrimination helps us to decide not to do such things, even when there might be immediate gains from doing them. So, it is only in the human realm that the concept of morality/immorality applies; the rest of Nature is amoral. (It should not be thought, however, that the mere not-doing of something negative constitutes morality; morality consists both of not-doing the negative, and of doing the positive. Thus, the Buddhist code of The Five Precepts covers only the negative aspect of morality; other things cover the positive side).

No one likes to be the victim of prejudice, and I say this from my own experience. Many years ago, I was attacked on the street in Istanbul, by a man who suddenly ran up to me and knocked me down. I had never seen him before, and had not done anything to antagonize him so do not know why he assaulted me, but suppose it might have been because he did not like Westerners. Another time, in Basra, Iraq, I was surrounded on the road by a mob, pointing at me and asking if I were American or Jewish — and that was in 1970! It was rather a dangerous situation, as I was alone, and the people were unfriendly. Fortunately, I was rescued by some Italians who were working at a nearby oil-refinery. And, when I was in India in 1988, I was refused accommodation in several hotels, and I'm convinced it was because of the color of my skin. These are just three of the many times I have experienced racial prejudice; I know what it's like to be on the receiving end of it, and didn't enjoy it, to say the least.

Right now, we are seeing the dismantling of Apartheid (this is Dutch, meaning 'apart-hood', or 'separateness' in South Africa, a cruel system that kept the white, black, and colored peoples there segregated, in the belief — which the descendants of the Boers, or Dutch settlers of South Africa, claim was supported by the Bible — that the white race was chosen by God as naturally superior to the black and colored races. This belief or conviction is known as Racism, and is usually considered as something we are taught, learn, or adopt; it is widely regarded as

something undesirable, as something of the past that we should feel ashamed of and outgrow. But it is still very much alive in the world, and probably, in some degree or other, it can be found in most, if not all of us. Yes, we all have it, even though we might be urbane about it. This does not mean that we would give way to it and express it, however, and many of us would feel horrified at the thought of doing so. It is just like being able to kill: all of us have this ability, but most of us restrain ourselves and do not kill. It might be likened to a dog that has the tendency to bark and snap at strangers; if we keep it on a leash, it can do no harm.

Does the color of one's skin really make one better or worse than others whose skin is of a different color? What is skin for, after all? Is it not to keep the outside out and the inside in? The Brahmins of India — even until today — consider themselves the highest of the four main castes there merely because they were born into that particular caste. Thus, they were not pleased to hear the Buddha say that a person becomes high-class or low by his actions, and not by birth. We can see that high-class people do not always behave in refined and cultured ways, and, conversely, that people born into the lower-classes do not always behave coarsely. Life is not ready-made and predetermined for us, but is what we make of it; it is up to us.

We sometimes hear people say that all races are the same and equal, but this is just too simplistic, and contributes nothing to the resolution of problems that arise from racial differences. If a white Australian or American goes to Singapore, for example, and needs directions, he might say to someone: "Excuse me, do you speak English?" Or if I get a letter in Chinese or Thai, and have no-one to translate it for me, I must try to find someone who looks like Chinese or Thai to help me with it; I would not go up to someone with blonde hair and ask them if they could translate it for me, would I? This means nothing less than racial discrimination; I recognize differences, and there is nothing at all wrong with it at this particular time; it is neither good nor bad, but natural. We might, sometime in the far-off future, reach a stage where everyone speaks the same language, and so there would be no need to ask anyone to translate (this would solve many problems, but not all; other problems would still remain, and maybe new problems would arise because of it).

Sometimes, people ask each other: "What kind of food would you like to eat tonight — Indian, Chinese, Thai, Italian, Mexican, or maybe

just MacDonald's?" Imagine life without a variety of foods to choose from; it would be rather dull, would it not? We discriminate between different kinds of food, and, in the same way, we discriminate between different races. Why? Because there are differences such as skin-color, language, customs, food, dress, beliefs, politics, etc. People are not photo-copies of some primeval prototype! And is there anyone so perfect that he would like everyone else to be exactly like him? Yes, there are people who think like that, but that's only because they've never really followed up their thoughts to picture what it would be like if everyone really were like them. How would you feel if everyone was an exact replica of yourself? Of what would your individuality — that thing that we think so much about — consist? You would be unable to recognize your parents, your wife/husband, your children, or your friends. You would soon grow to hate the uniformity of it all, and wish it were all different again. Be thankful, therefore, for the diversity of life, and do not think of yourself as a model for the whole world. Try to see that the differences of others make you what you are: a unique and special individual, unlike anyone else that has ever lived or will live.

Much antagonism towards others who are different arises because people feel threatened by things that they know little or nothing about, and which therefore might be dangerous; this can be traced back to our primitive past, and there is a little Sufi story to illustrate people's fear of the unknown: A traveler in the Land of Fools came to a village where he found the people in a state of great consternation. When he asked what had happened, the people told him that they had discovered monsters in one of their fields. Curious, the traveler asked the villagers to show him the monsters, and they agreed to do so, but only after much trepidation. Approaching the field very cautiously, the people pointed to the monsters, and the traveler laughed aloud, walked into the field, where he took out his knife, cut a slice of the largest water-melon, and ate it. The villagers watched in horror, and instead of thanking the stranger for delivering them from the 'monsters', they became more alarmed than before. "This man who kills monsters may be a worse monster than they! He is dangerous, and if we let him stay here, he might destroy us, too!" So, with sticks and stones, they attacked him, and drove him off.

You cannot change the whole world; you cannot banish the specter of prejudice in anyone but yourself. You cannot make anyone understand, but you can try to understand, yourself.

I recently read of a young Vietnamese in Melbourne who had worked hard and saved enough to buy an expensive sports-car that he had long dreamed of owning. But it wasn't long before his pride-and-joy, parked outside the block of municipal flats where he lived, had its windows smashed, tires slashed, tape-player and other things stolen, etc. This was very sad, of course, and no-one would condone it, but perhaps he should have been a bit more far-sighted, and anticipated the effect that his car might have had upon others, standing in the parking-lot beside their second- or third-hand cheaper models; not surprisingly, they might envy his car, but, being unable to afford one like it themselves, might also feel the urge to damage and destroy it. In a way, the owner was being ostentatious. Would not a cheaper and less-obvious car have served him just as well, and caused him less trouble? Some people are antagonistic enough already, without being taunted.

Prejudice will always exist in the world, and though we should take a stand against it, we can only do so by first confronting it ourselves. This requires honesty, and an acceptance of the fact that our minds are not really our own, but have been built up, since our birth — and perhaps earlier, at least nine months earlier — by our conditioning, without which, in some ways, we would not have been able to survive, but which has, in other ways, bent, twisted, and stunted our psychological growth. If we can understand our minds more, and see how prejudice has grown there — often not of our own planting, but like weeds in a garden — then we shall be better equipped to control it.

Having had the good fortune to travel widely, I have lived with many different kinds of people, and have seen things from different points of view. While this does not mean that I have become free of prejudice thereby, it has had the effect, I feel, of broadening my mind. And because — as mentioned earlier — I have experienced the unpleasantness of prejudice myself, I have therefore a good reason not to express towards others any such prejudice that might be in my own mind. So, you see, there is something that we can do about it.

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## I WILL LET YOU DOWN

**WE** OFTEN HEAR PEOPLE SAY THINGS LIKE: "DON'T worry; I won't let you down! You can rely on me!"; but this is often just a prelude to doing the very thing that they say they won't do! This is not to imply that nobody keeps their word nowadays, because this is not so; there are still people to whom giving their word or making promises is something serious and important, but compared with those who think lightly of such things, they are in a minority — a small minority. Many of us think nothing of breaking our word when it is inconvenient for us to keep it. While we do not like others to let us down, we are often guilty of letting others down.

Now, rather than saying to people who listen to me speak or read what I write: "I won't let you down", I will say, on the contrary: "I will let you down", in order to make it as clear as possible that if we are sincere in our pursuit of Dharma, we should beware of the unreliability of personality — our own as well as that of others — and not use it as a foundation; we should realize that Dharma is impersonal.

Personality-cults abound and flourish in the world, from major religions like Christianity (with Jesus indispensably at the center), to small groups like that which coalesced around David Koresh in Waco, Texas recently, and the stir among expatriate Vietnamese Buddhists caused by the nun named Thanh Hai (Ching Hai) who sometimes dresses like a movie-star and proclaims not only that she is a 'Living Buddha', but that she is 'supreme' and even higher than the Founder of Buddhism Himself, the historical Gotama Buddha! The gullibility of many people is truly marvelous; there is nothing so preposterous and foolish that some people won't eagerly accept and believe it. And though it is true that, by closing their eyes and living in a dream, they derive a certain amount of comfort and assurance, they are eventually let down (unless they die under their illusions), and find themselves worse off than before, being older and less able to make a new start.

We have come a long way since the time of the Buddha, and the movement that He started has been considerably corrupted and distorted, both from within and without. Just as Buddhism had a great impact on the religious life of India during the centuries of its ascendancy, so too,

it was greatly influenced by Hinduism during its period of affluence and decline and was eventually swallowed up by it, so that what we have today is a mixture of what the Buddha taught, Hindu influence, and the cultural barnacles that stuck to it as it spread outwards from the land of its birth. This is clearly seen in the role of priest that Buddhist monks have taken upon themselves — unknowingly, in most cases, it must be said, but nonetheless that is the role that they have taken — and the ceremonies they perform, together with what the Buddha termed 'low arts' like palmistry, astrology, geomancy, and other forms of divination, which He forbade His monks to engage in as such practices attract people for the wrong reasons. Today, more — far more — monks are involved in such things than in propagating the Dharma, so much so that it is commonly expected of monks that they 'tell fortunes' and calculate/predict 'lucky days'.

Given the propensity of people to fall at the feet of 'savior-figures', it seems that the simple and clear message of the Buddha to "be an island, a lamp, a refuge unto yourselves" will never be widely accepted, but even so, there are always some people who will rejoice in hearing this clarion-call to develop self-reliance and throw off the chains of psychological dependence on others. If it is only for the few, so be it. The fact that it might not be accepted by the majority of people does not negate its validity.

Although I will try not to deliberately let anyone down, the nature of personality makes it likely that I will do so, in one way or another. Therefore I will warn people about this first, so that they will be able to listen to what I say without attaching much importance to me personally — either negatively or positively — and will not be too disappointed when I unintentionally and inevitably let them down. I feel that what I write and talk about can, — or should be able to, — stand on its own, and not upon my personality. This is because I take seriously the Buddha's advice to test His teachings as a goldsmith would test gold, instead of merely believing; if this applies to His teachings, how much more does it apply to my numblings?!

I have stuck my neck out to say this not just about myself but about anyone and everyone. What we should be looking for is not a person but the unshakable facts of life that do not change and which will not let us down. And if I have pointed my finger at anyone in this or other writings,

I have done it not with the desire to camouflage myself or distract attention away from my own numerous shortcomings or gloss over my faults — like a thief who is being pursued might shout: "Stop, thief", in order to create the impression among bystanders that he is one of the pursuers rather than the pursued — but to indicate something more firm and true than personality.

It is a commonly held opinion that unless a person is enlightened himself, he is not in a position to help anyone else to become enlightened, but I do not share this view. It would be much like someone seeing someone else injured and bleeding, and saying to him: "I'm sorry; I would like to help you, but I'm not a doctor". Every mother — and most other people, for that matter — knows what it is to treat minor injuries; there is no need to go to a doctor for every little wound or pain. Likewise, we all have the capacity — in varying degrees — to assist others along the Way; we don't have to be a fully-enlightened Buddha for that. And in so doing, we express the enlightenment that we already have — in whatever small amount — and thereby increase it. If we were to hold back and refuse to help until we were fully-enlightened, nobody — including ourselves — would get any help at all.

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## SO MANY TO THANK

**I**T HAS LONG BEEN IN MY MIND TO WRITE A BOOK ABOUT people to whom I feel grateful for the help they gave me along my way, but I never made a start on it as I felt that if I began, I would never finish, because there were just so many, and as I go on, I receive more help (we all do).

Now, however, I have decided to delay no longer, but to make a start, even if it's not a whole book on the subject, and even if I limit myself, necessarily, to mentioning just one or two people who helped and encouraged me, for I feel that, in our day and age, where so much is taken for granted, and we have become jaded and mediocre, it is good to be reminded, frequently, of how much we depend upon others. I hope that no-one will be offended if I do not mention them, and that everyone will understand and rejoice with me in expressing my gratitude in these pages. I would also like to say that if I, in my humble and limited capacity, am able to pass on anything useful to someone — and without boasting, I know that this occasionally happens — it is because of the help and support I have received from others. No-one acts alone, lives alone, or dies alone, but only in concert with others.

We are as we are, not just because of our own efforts (which, if analyzed carefully, contributed not as much as we think to the overall result), but mainly because of the influence of countless others, living and dead, met and unmet, known and unknown. Just think of how much our lives depend upon language, for example — together with many other things of local and worldwide culture — that we were born into; as we think, so we speak and act, and so we become; our lives are greatly conditioned by words, by language, and more so if we are not aware of it.

We are all flowers on the human tree, and it would not be incorrect to say that the whole of human history and prehistory is present in all of us, with the influence of active, creative, inventive, thinking individuals more present in us than that of the passive and thoughtless masses that populate the Earth in any age. However, it should not be forgotten that the high rests upon the low — we can have the foundations of a building without the roof, but we cannot have the roof without the foundations or

walls — and without the latter kind of people, the former could not exist. The influence of the active but negative people is also present in us, because positive and negative always go together, inseparably, and as we all know, it is easier to learn and acquire something negative than something positive, just like it is easier to fall down a tree than it is to climb one.

If we have never thought of ourselves in this light, it is not too late to do so, and to consider this thing — this body-mind — that we have somehow evolved into, for in taking stock of it and understanding more of it than we did previously, we will be better able to control and direct our lives, and have more choice in the way we want to live, instead of always being under the control of our feelings or outside influences. Right now, we cannot talk of 'free will', as our wills are not free, but heavily conditioned. If it can ever be completely free, completely our own, I don't know, and dare not say, but it can, I am sure, be more ours than it is right now.

Now, I do not claim that I know myself very well, as there are many things about myself that I am only dimly aware of, and probably many that I know nothing of at all; but in spite of this, I feel that I know myself better than anyone else does, especially because I do not live long in one place, but move around a lot. I am aware that I have a number of faults and imperfections (who doesn't?), and they don't go away merely because I'm aware of them and don't want them. But, on the other hand, because I do not subscribe to the basic Christian idea that man's nature is totally corrupt and can only be redeemed by 'God's grace', I am convinced that there is goodness in everyone, including myself. I have some positive qualities — if not as many as I would like — and if I were to be falsely modest and deny that I have any, I would be contradicting what I have said above about positive and negative always going together inseparably. However, because I feel I know myself better than anyone else does, I advise people not to look too closely at me or place importance on my personality, but to divorce this from the things I say, and try to find something in my words that might be useful to them long after I've gone and they've forgotten me. In spite of this exhortation, however, I know that some people will insist upon picking up my 'droppings', as it were, instead of the occasional pearl that might be found in my words. (And this applies not just to myself, but to others, too). What can I do about this? If that is what they prefer, in spite of my warnings, well, let them have it!

Where my spiritual search began I cannot say, for if we look for the beginning of anything, it will lead us back and back, from one thing to another, and no sooner do we think we've found it, then we find something else before that, and something before that, on and on, until finally, we realize that there is no beginning to anything, but just links in a chain — or knots in a net — that stretches out to infinity. And we may suppose, from such observations, that just as a beginning to anything cannot be discovered, so also, a final end to anything cannot be conceived of. We are told now, are we not?, that nothing can be completely destroyed but only transformed into something else. We might consider ourselves in this light: where we came from prior to our birth we do not know, and must admit this, just as we don't know what will happen to us after we die. This, however, we do know: we were born. We also know that we did not remain as babies, but grew and developed from that state to the state we are now in. We can see, too, that we will not remain like this, but will grow older (even if we don't become old), and sooner or later we will die. This is certain. After that, although we can see that the body is transformed, either quickly, through cremation, to ash, heat, and smoke, or slowly, by decaying in the ground and becoming something else, we cannot say anything for sure. And what happens to the mind after death? We may surmise that such a potent thing — and who would deny that it is this? — cannot just abruptly cease to exist. We must, for lack of evidence or personal experience, plead ignorance and suspend judgment about this. It's no use repeating old beliefs and theories that have come down to us from the past, for though these might be comforting and consoling, we still do not know!

However, for the sake of conveniently relating part of my story, I will choose something that took place in 1970, when I was in India. My purpose had been to travel overland from Europe as far as possible, and then to go by plane or ship the rest of the way to Australia, to meet up with my parents, who had recently migrated there. I supposed that Australia would become my home too, and so, thinking that it might be my last time in India (I had been there before), I decided to wander around for a few months and visit some of the ancient and holy places before leaving for Australia.

While in south India, in the holy town of Rameshwaram, where there is a huge and marvelous Hindu temple, I was approached on the street one day by a yogi or sadhu — a middle-aged man with very long

hair and beard, his thin and wiry body clad in just a loin-cloth. He spoke no English, and I spoke very little Hindi, which was his native tongue, being from north India; but somehow, we were able to communicate. This meeting turned out to be a major turning-point in my life, for whereas before, I had had no real direction or purpose in my life, after that I embarked upon the journey that I'm still on. He invited me to stay with him in a nearby pilgrim's rest-house known as a 'Dharmasala' or 'choultry', and I accepted, sleeping on the cement floor and bathing at the well. I stayed with him for only a few days before resuming my wanderings, and although during this time he gave me no specific lessons that I can remember and put my finger on, I think of him — Jagadish Narayan — as having played an important role in my life. May he be well and happy wherever he now is!

From Rameshwaram, I began a journey that took me from Kanyakumari — the southernmost tip of that vast and fascinating country — through the southern states of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, the central states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, the western states of Gujarat and Rajasthan, to the northern states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. In one of my previous books — BECAUSE I CARE — I have written about several illuminating experiences I had at the cave-temples of Ajanta-Ellora and the ancient Buddhist site of Sanchi, so will not repeat that here. Instead, I will pass on to New Delhi where, late one afternoon, as I was making my way out of the city by foot to a highway where I hoped to be able to hitch a ride in the direction of India's holiest city, Benares, I was overtaken by a Buddhist monk, who asked me where I was going. When I told him, he invited me to spend the night in his temple nearby. I accepted his invitation, and went with him to the temple, which was a simple building of corrugated-iron with a banyan-tree in the compound, and little else. He introduced me to his brother-monk there, who, like himself, was from Chittagong in what was then East Pakistan, but which soon afterwards became Bangladesh. I was received hospitably, and a charpoy (Indian bed with a frame of wood interlaced with ropes), was placed out in the yard for me to sleep on under the stars; in October, this was quite suitable, as the rainy season was just over and the nights were mild. I do not recall being bothered by mosquitoes, so there were probably not many, and those that there were I was able to tolerate by then, having traveled extensively in India and grown accustomed to sleeping on a rush-mat that I carried with me.

The next day, Venerable Dhammika — for such was the friendly monk's name — invited me to accompany him to the home of some of his supporters. On the way there, by scooter-rickshaw, he told me that, a few days earlier, one of the children of the family we were going to visit had been knocked down by a car and had died as a result; the funeral was already over, and he was going to the house to give a memorial sermon.

I should say here, before going any further, that Venerable Dhammika was the first monk I had ever met, and so I knew nothing at all about the lifestyle of monks. Therefore, I didn't think it unusual when he instructed the family to prepare a seat for me alongside his against the wall, and to serve food to both of us, while the family sat facing us. So I sat there and ate what was given, unaware that monks of the Theravada school of Buddhism, of which he was a follower, never ate together with non-monks, but always separately. Perhaps he thought it would be inconvenient to tell me about this, or maybe he placed little importance on this custom and was ready to overlook it; I do not know.

After eating, the monk took his long-handled preaching-fan, such as is commonly used by Theravada monks in Thailand, and holding it before him so that the people could hear him without seeing his face, he began to speak. Now, I didn't understand a word of what he was saying, although I presumed it must have been about the death of the child. But, whereas the people in front of him could not see his face because of the fan, I, who was still sitting beside him, could, and I saw that, as he was speaking, he was weeping, and tears were rolling down his cheeks. This moved me, for I saw that he cared so much for the people to whom he was speaking, and shared in their loss. I didn't know, at that time, that monks are supposed to restrain themselves, and not to show their emotions so. On the other hand, however, we are taught to consider others as ourselves, and to feel the suffering and pain of others as our own, for it is by identifying ourselves with others that compassion arises.

I will state unequivocally here that I was far more impressed with Venerable Dhammika of New Delhi, who was not ashamed to weep with the family over their loss, than with all the monks and nuns who I've seen performing ceremonies over the years — far more impressed, and favorably so! Should a monk make his heart cold and hard like a stone, that nothing can move? We all know, of course, that no one lives forever, and that it's only a matter of time before we all go through the gateway

of death. Increasing detachment and equanimity result from reflection on this and insight into how things are, but it has nothing to do with mere unconcern or indifference towards others.

I stayed with Venerable Dhammika and his brother-monk for only three days. During this time, the brother-monk, noting my interest, asked me whether I would like to ordain, and if so, he would ordain me. I told him that I would (I had already decided this after my experiences at Ajanta and Sanchi), but that I wasn't ready, as I wanted first to go to Australia to visit my parents, and to tell them, in person, that I would be going back to India to become a monk. Thanking them, I took my leave, and went on my way.

Over the years, I have thought many times about Venerable Dhammika and his kindness to me, but this is the first time I have written about him; I confess my neglect. In 1988, I was back in New Delhi for the first time since 1970, but I couldn't recall just where his tiny temple was located. I made some inquiries, and a monk at another small temple that I came across told me that he had died some years before; I don't know if this were true (I remember feeling somewhat doubtful about the information at the time) and when I was in Delhi again at the end of last year — 1993 — I made another search for him, but Delhi had changed so much in the meantime that I was no more successful in finding him or his temple than in 1988. However, the fact that I wasn't able to see him again does not diminish the respect I still have for him. He was the first monk I met, and without intending to, he gave me something that has stayed with me until now: an example of humility and kindness and concern towards others. I consider myself fortunate to have met him, particularly at that stage of my life; his example has helped to sustain me through times of doubt and depression. Whatever and however he is right now, I wish him well in every way, and am grateful to him forever!

Anything I might be able to pass on to others in the way of Dharma is due to people like Venerable Dhammika and Jagadish Narayan, and in this way, perhaps I am able to repay them somewhat.

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## OPEN UP

**YOU DON'T NEED TO BE AN ORNITHOLOGIST TO KNOW** that swallows feed in flight, pigeons on the ground and ducks in water; they are programmed like this, and have no choice about it; they cannot change their eating-habits. Imagine pigeons diving for grain, or ducks looking for algae, tadpoles and larvae in the air!

Man, however, is much more complex in his ways than birds, and has vastly more potential to evolve. Sadly, many of us know little about this, and it is so easy for us to lock ourselves into fixed and rigid positions, which we then feel we must defend, with the idea that we are right. We become polarized, and unable/unwilling to look at things except in our own narrow ways. Consequently, the worlds we create for ourselves — and yes, we all have our own personal worlds, as well as the great communal world in which we all live together — are small and restrictive, like prisons, and there is no-one to blame for this but ourselves.

It seldom happens that we think "I am wrong, and you are right", for if we thought like this, many of our problems and conflicts with others would immediately dissolve. As it is, many of us are victims of our own shortsightedness. But does it have to be so? If we are so sure that we are right, we need not be afraid to bend, and to look at things from the standpoints of others; fear and unwillingness to do so indicates a state of insecurity and uncertainty about our own viewpoint; like this, therefore, to be sure is to be unsure. This can clearly be seen in people who cling fanatically and fearfully to religious beliefs and ideas — especially fundamentalists, who seem unable to reconcile life in the present with their concepts, and so reject the former in favour of the latter, which they consider more valid. Thus, the letter of the law becomes more important than the spirit. Just think of the importance that some people attach to religious circumcision, for example: does the removal of a little bit of skin make a person morally or spiritually better than others? What a fallacy! But thinking that it does makes them bigoted. And does bathing in rivers regarded as 'sacred' make a person any more holy or enlightened? Not necessarily! It depends more upon the state of mind of the bather than where he bathes; so if he considers all water to be sacred, he could stay at home and bathe, and save himself the trouble and expense of going on a pilgrimage to the Ganges!



Joseph Campbell was certainly being a little sarcastic when he wrote, in his book: "Occidental Mythology": "One of the glories of the Bible is the eloquence of its damnation of all ways of worship but its own. Furthermore, Yahweh's frustration of the work (the building of the tower of Babel as told of in the book of Genesis) through a multiplication of the people's languages and scattering of them over the earth (as though until c. 2500 B.C. there had been but one language in the world and no dispersion of peoples) is chiefly valid as a text to the old Hebrew notion that all languages but Hebrew are secondary. On opening a pleasant little Hebrew primer dated as recently as 1957, the student learns that 'this is the language which God spoke'. The idea is the same as that which underlies the Indian regard for Sanskrit, namely, that the words of this holy tongue are the 'true' names of things; they are the words from which things sprang at the time of creation. The words of this language are antecedent to the universe; they are its spiritual form and support. Hence, in their study one approaches the truth and being, reality and power, of divinity itself".

Our ways of looking at things might be right, from where we stand, but if that is the only way we look at things from, we will get merely a two-dimensional picture, like a photograph. We must try to realize that, just as we have our ways of looking at things, so others have theirs, which, to them, are equally valid as ours to us. We do not have to agree with other people's ways of looking at things, but if — once in a while, at least — we would try to see things from their points-of-view, we might get a clearer picture, more complete, and with the third dimension of depth, than by just looking from our own angle. It is a fundamental error, from which countless conflicts stem, to suppose that just because it is our point-of-view, it must automatically be right. And, while we are often generous in our criticism of others and their opinions, we should be prepared to turn the spotlight of scrutiny on ourselves now and then. This might sometimes be uncomfortable, but it would certainly help us to be less critical of others, and also be of benefit to our own search for ourselves.

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