

Buddhist Ethics

The Path to Nirvāna

Hammalawa Saddhatissa

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3 The Significance of the Refuges

THE THREEFOLD REFUGES

In Buddhism there is no formal code of prohibitions. A follower of the Buddha lives according to the Buddha's teaching and declares his intention to do so in using the following formula called '*Tisarāṇa*', or '*Three Refuges*'.

Since the full implication cannot be conveyed in short English phrases, it is necessary to consider the Pali words. They are: *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.* They may be translated, word for word, as: To the Buddha as a refuge I go; to the Dhamma as a refuge I go; to the Saṅgha as a refuge I go.

'*Saraṇaṃ*', however, does not denote exclusively 'refuge', and in the comprehensive sense in which it should be taken lies the relationship of the 'Buddhist' to the Buddha which will eventually determine his whole attitude towards life. '*Saraṇa*' is common to both the Sanskrit and Pali languages, and for the Sanskrit Monier Williams gives:⁷⁸ '*Saraṇa*: protecting preserving. (Vedic. *say rakṣhake*, *Rgveda* VI. 47. 8); one who protects or preserves; a protector, preserver, defender. (a) n. help, defence; a refuge, place of refuge, sanctuary, asylum (sometimes applied to a person); a private apartment, closet; a house, habitation, abode, lair, resting-place (of an animal).' Regarding the Pali we have from Rhys Davids and Stede: '*Saraṇa*: (Cp. Vedic.) ... shelter, house, refuge, protection, etc.'⁷⁹ Buddhadatta Mahāthera gives: 'Protection, help, refuge, a shelter.'⁸⁰

'Refuge' is therefore the most acceptable short-form translation of *saraṇaṃ*, but in no sense can the declaration of taking the

Three Refuges be interpreted as an undertaking to comply with blind, unreasoning obedience to a series of orders or commandments. In contrast to the monotheistic religions which depend entirely on faith, and to the systems which have developed *bhakti*, devotion, as an end in itself, the Buddha denounced blind faith, pointing out that it is merely a form of ignorance which retards one's purification and therefore development. When consulted by the Kālāmas of Kesaputta as to how they should choose between the various pronouncements of their many visiting teachers, each of whom claimed that his dogma or method was the only one leading to the desired perfection, the Buddha replied: 'Whenever you find out for yourself ... "these things are bad, reprehensible, condemned by the wise, are not rightly taken upon oneself, lead to harm and suffering", you should abandon them. ... Whenever you find out for yourself "these things are good, blameless, extolled by the wise, are rightly taken on oneself, lead to welfare and happiness", you, having attained to this, should there remain.'⁸¹ Frequently throughout this address he observed: 'Do not accept anything because of report, tradition, hearsay, the handing on in the sacred texts, or as a result of logic or inference, through indulgent tolerance of views, appearance of likelihood, or as paying respect to a teacher.'⁸² Of his own teaching the Buddha said: 'As a wise man uses gold as a touchstone, heating and cutting, so you, bhikkhus, should take my words after investigation and not because of reverence for me.'⁸³ So is achieved *śraddhā*, confidence, an attitude directly opposed to that of blind faith. Of it the Buddha said: 'Confidence is the greatest wealth of man in the world.'⁸⁴

Concerning *saraṇa* as 'protection', the Buddha has never made any declaration to the effect: 'Abandoning all duties (*dharmāṇi*), come to me as the only shelter. Do not be grieved; I will liberate thee from all evils.'⁸⁵ But he does make clear that one will achieve liberation as a result of one's own efforts made in accordance with the refuge described in the following passage: 'Many persons, indeed, driven by fear, move quickly to mountains, forests, the parks and trees of shrines, as a refuge. That is not a

safe refuge; it is not the best refuge. Having come to this refuge one is not freed from all suffering. But he who goes for refuge to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, by right wisdom and insight perceives the Four Noble Truths: Suffering, the Origin of Suffering, the Passing-Beyond Suffering, and the Way to the Calming of Suffering. This is the safe Refuge, this is the best Refuge. Having come to this Refuge one is freed from all suffering.⁸⁶

It should be noted that the protection sought is not only from worldly ills but from the whole mass of suffering to which mankind is subject. The true nature of the Refuges was to be understood as follows: '... the disciple of the Noble Ones is possessed of this clear confidence in the Buddha; that the Exalted One is rightly named the Fully-Enlightened One, perfect in knowledge and conduct, wise as to the words, an incomparable guide to man's self-mastery, happy, a teacher of devas and men, a Buddha, an Exalted One. The disciple of the Noble Ones is possessed of this clear confidence in the Dhamma: the Dhamma is well-preached by the Exalted One, is evident in this life, is not subject to time, invites every man to come and see for himself, and brings near that which should be known to the wise each for himself. He has this clear confidence in the Saṅgha: that the Saṅgha of the followers of the Exalted One is entered on the direct right path, is walking in the right path, the proper path, namely the four pairs of persons, the eight classes of individuals;⁸⁷ that the Saṅgha is worthy of offerings, of hospitality, of gifts, or being honoured; that the Saṅgha is the incomparable source of merit for the world, that it is possessed of the precepts believed in by the wise, in entirety, without defects, continuously, which bring freedom to men, are extolled by the wise, which are uncorrupted, and which lead to *Samādhi*.⁸⁸ It is now quite clear that the taking of Refuge means resolving to follow the guidance or shining example of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha.

THE FIRST REFUGE: THE BUDDHA

Taking refuge in the Buddha implies no personal guarantee that the Buddha himself will effect the arrival at the Goal of any of his

followers. To the contrary, he says: 'Surely by oneself is evil done, by oneself one becomes pure. Purity and impurity are of the individual. No one purifies another.'⁸⁹ When referring to progress to the Goal he frequently used the expression '*sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā*', having thoroughly understood and experienced for oneself.

KARMA

According to the doctrine of (karma) future happiness is a direct result or continuation of the maintaining of a satisfactory standard of conduct in the present. But there were wrong actions in the past which must produce their effects in the present and in the future. If inevitably one reaps the results of one's actions, good or bad, and there is no means of avoiding the results on the strength of the moral excellence of another person, the best that can be done to gain secure and lasting well-being is to cut down the evil actions and increase the good ones. There is freedom of will in making a choice, but clearly there must be cultivation of vision and discernment to detect when a choice should be made. Of cultivation of will-power and cultivation of discernment the Buddhist teaching stresses the latter more than the former, for, since blind obedience is not encouraged, unless a person is convinced that he is pursuing a wrong course he is unlikely to abandon it if it seems to be attractive. It says in the *Dhammapada*: 'If by renouncing a relatively small happiness one sees a happiness great by comparison, the wise man abandons the small happiness in consideration of the great happiness.'⁹⁰ It is therefore necessary that one should be willing to discern a possible comparison and be able to draw it.

Such matters are not always evident in the devotion and pageantry associated with Buddhism in the Buddhist countries, and the mental attitude of persons participating in these must be made clear. Nowadays the central tangible object of a ceremonial display consists, almost invariably, in a Buddha-*pratimā*, or image of the Buddha, but such figures were unknown until the first century BC. When before that date it was desired to reproduce a scene including the Buddha, his presence was indicated by a symbol such as a Bodhi tree, wheel, lotus or feet, these being also employed to represent certain ideas of Buddhism. It is

generally considered that non-Indian influences, notably perhaps the Greek, brought about the representation of the Buddha in the manner of a human figure. But a Buddhist goes before an image and offers flowers or incense not to the model but to the Buddha as the perfection; he goes as a mark of gratitude and reflects on the perfection of the Buddha, meditating on the transiency of the fading flowers. As he offers the flowers the Buddhist recites: 'With divers flowers to the Buddha I do homage (*pūjā*), and through this merit may there be release. Even as these flowers must fade, so does my body progress to a stage of dissolution.'⁹¹ This is not a canonical text but is a very old traditional verse.

Though an image or some such symbol is useful to the ordinary person in helping him to concentrate his attention, an intellectual could dispense with it since he would direct his thoughts, probably concentrating on a passage such as the following: 'Such indeed is the Exalted One, Worthy One, Fully Enlightened One, Perfect One in wisdom and virtue, the Happy One, the Knower of the world, an Incomparable Guide to man's self-mastery, a Teacher of gods and men, the Blessed One.'⁹²

But genuine reverence for the Buddha is to be measured only by the extent to which one follows his teaching. 'He who, having entered on the course, lives in conformity with the Dhamma, having engaged in practices in conformity with the Dhamma, pays reverence to the Tathāgata.'⁹³

How does this attitude affect the moral outlook of the Buddhist? In contrast to the theistic religions where man is a subservient creature, for ever below God or the gods until such being or beings should feel inclined to raise his status, the Buddhist has it in his own power to rise as high as he likes provided he is willing to make the effort. The Buddhist's mentality is never enslaved; he does not sacrifice freedom of thought or freedom of will. Here is the advantage of *śraddhā*, *saddhā*, confidence born of understanding, over blind faith. The Buddhist pilgrim starts out on a worthwhile journey in happy expectancy, with plenty of equipment and good chance of success; he is never a 'miserable sinner'.

THE SECOND REFUGE: THE DHAMMA

'He who sees the Dhamma, Vakkali, sees me; he who sees me sees the Dhamma,'⁹⁴ said the Buddha to one of his disciples who was anxious to get a glimpse of him.

We have already considered the term 'Dhamma' as 'things in general' and from its derivation can attribute to it a meaning as of duty or duties; we now take 'dhamma' in the sense of 'teaching' or 'doctrine', and here distinguish between the teaching itself and the sacred texts recording that teaching.

Regarding notable pre-Buddhistic doctrines the Brahman-Ātman ideal and the derivatives of the personification of Brahman as Brahmā have been mentioned, but in order to appreciate fully the innovations of the Buddha's teaching we consider in some detail the current opinions with which he had to deal. Many of them have figured in philosophic and religious thought throughout the centuries, and still form subjects of considerable debate.

In one of the oldest records that have come down to us, namely, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, otherwise Discourse on the 'Net' of Brahmā, *Dīgha Nikaya* I, dating from the sixth to fifth century BC, the Buddha described various classes of beliefs and gave reasons adduced by holders as support. He dealt first with persons who attempted to reconstruct the ultimate beginnings of things and who deduced the eternity of the world and the self. In this case, by reason of extreme ardour, striving and right attention, a Samaṇa or Brahman is able to call to mind his earlier existences. He recollects: 'In such-and-such a place my name, ancestry, food, happy and sorrowful experiences were thus and thus, coming to an end at such-and-such an age. Then my consciousness died down, arising again in such-and-such a place. There my name, ancestry, appearance, food, happy and sorrowful experiences were thus and thus, coming to an end at such-and-such an age. Then my consciousness died down, arising again in such-and-such a place. There my name, ancestry, appearance, food, happy and sorrowful experiences were thus and thus, coming to an end at such-and-such an age; my con-

sciousness died down and arose again here.' In such fashion he calls to mind, point by point, the activities and circumstances of the existences in which he was previously engaged. He says: 'The self is eternal; and the world, producing nothing new, stands out immovable as a strong pillar. Living beings moving continuously through existences, pass away and rise up again; yet it is eternally the same.'⁹⁵ With greater application the ascetic or Brahman remembers existences more remote, while a similar conclusion may also be reached by the sophist-logician who is practised in specious argument and is possessed of a ready wit.

The second class comprises the belief that some things are eternal and others are not. Here it is suggested that the sometime inhabitants of the present world have been reborn as devas, in this case in the realm of the radiance (*Ābhassara*). After a lengthy period one of these beings, either because his merit is exhausted or because his duration of life is spent, re-arises in a lower sphere equivalent to that of Brahma. This is still a 'Fine-material' sphere⁹⁶ and birth and death still occur. The fallen one is lonely and wishes for companions. These appear, also from the *Ābhassara*, and for similar reasons. To the first arrival in the Brahma-world they seem to have come in accordance with his wish; to them, from his being there first, he is the ruler of the realm. He is therefore the 'Great' Brahmā, 'Overlord', the Unvanquished, to be perceived by others as 'Be-It-So' (*i.e. self-existent*), wielding power, the Master, the Maker by Creation, the Most Excellent to be produced having power, the Father of all produced in the states of existence.⁹⁷ Subsequently one of the Brahma-world re-arises in the present world. Disgusted with the conditions prevailing, he becomes a *samana*, or homeless wanderer. He recalls his former existence in the Brahma-world, though not elsewhere, and thinks of Brahmā in the terms described above. But to him it seems also: 'We were created by Brahmā because he is permanent, constant, eternal, a changeless thing; he stands eternally the same, the Truth. Moreover, we who were created by Brahmā have come to the present state as being impermanent, subject to change, of short life, as things that fall away and die.'⁹⁸ Hence, said the Buddha, arises the opinion that some things are

eternal and some are not, that the 'self' and the world are partly eternal and partly not eternal.

Other instances of this belief arise from the falling from the state of gods 'blemished by pleasure' (*khiddāpadosikā*), or 'blemished in mind' (*manopadosikā*). These re-arise in the *kāmaloka*, become recluses, and, realising their former existence, come to the conclusion reached by the beings fallen from the Brahma-world. A fourth case cited is that of the sophist-logician accustomed to specious argument and to use of his own ready wit. Such a person holds: 'That which is called eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, that "self" is impermanent, subject to change, non-eternal, a changing thing. That which is called thought, or mind, or consciousness, that "self" is eternal, a changeless thing, standing eternally the same and thus the Truth.'⁹⁹

Other classes of beliefs which confronted the Buddha and on which, together with the two classes just mentioned, he pronounced a verdict, consisted in the following: the belief in limitation or infinite extension of the world in one or more directions, the existence of the world as occurring by chance, the conscious or unconscious existence of the self after death (with variations as to form, duration, modes of perception, states of happiness or misery), the belief in total annihilation, and the highest bliss obtainable in this world. A short dissertation concerning persons who, through lack of understanding, avoid expressing definite opinions is also included. Of these foregoing, the supporters of the theory of limitation, the fortuitous origin of the world, and the conscious or unconscious existence of the self after death, rely for their evidence largely on experience of an exalted state of mind which is here not clearly defined. The Annihilationists and the supporters of the particular states of bliss in this world adduce evidence from their experiences of the Jhānic states.

We come now to the verdict passed by the Buddha. Of the ascetics and Brahmans who reconstruct the past and arrange the future, or both, he says: 'These view-points, thus taken up, thus adhered to, will have for result future rebirth. That the Tathāgata knows, and he knows immeasurably beyond. But he is not

attached to the knowledge, and from this lack of attachment has found out for himself the final bliss.) Having come to know, as they really are according to the Truth, the origin of feelings, their passing away, their satisfaction and disadvantages, and the way of departure from them, the Tathāgata, from not grasping at the world, is freed.¹⁰⁰

Of the speculations he says: 'They derive from the lack of knowledge and understanding of the ascetics and brahmins, and from the resulting feeling and cravings with their attendant worry and struggle. They are due to contact (with the senses). They all experience feelings from constant touching in the six fields of contact. To them, with feeling as cause and conditioning factor comes craving; with craving as cause and conditioning factor comes the grasping for support; from grasping for support, the process of life; from the process of life, birth; and from birth as cause and conditioning factor come decay and death, with the arising of grief, lamentation, ill, suffering, and all trouble. From the time the bhikkhu comes to know, as they really are according to the Truth, the origin and passing away, the satisfaction and disadvantages of, and the way of departure from the six fields of contact, he comes to know that which lies beyond them all.'¹⁰¹

To the Buddha, then, the individual theories concerning the ultimate beginnings and ends of things were merely unintelligent, and since they were all founded on one basic error the only worthwhile course to pursue lay in exposing that error. Summing up his own experience he said: 'Repeated birth is suffering. Housebuilder, you are seen! You will not again build the house. The ribs of the hall are broken, the peak of the house is thrown apart. Having come to a condition divested of all phenomena, mind has obtained destruction of craving.'¹⁰² But there remains also for consideration the effect of teachings regarding the ultimate beginnings and ends of things, and, in view of the deficiencies of these teachings, the estimate of the Buddha's reasons for declaring his own teachings was made by him on many occasions. These were enunciated very clearly on the occasion of his visit to the debating-hall in Queen Mallikā's¹⁰³ park where

Poṭṭhapāda, the wandering mendicant, was staying at the time.¹⁰⁴

Having been welcomed, the Buddha enquired the subject of the debate in progress, but Poṭṭhapāda introduced instead that of cessation of consciousness, a matter on which discussion was frequently held. After exchange of opinions the Buddha remarked: 'It is difficult for you, Poṭṭhapāda, through your other views, other beliefs, inclinations, connections, procedures, to understand either "Consciousness is a man's self" or "Consciousness is one thing and the self another".'¹⁰⁵ Poṭṭhapāda then put the question: '(i) Is the world eternal, or (ii) is it not eternal, (iii) is the universe finite or (iv) is it infinite, (v) is soul the same as body or (vi) is soul one thing and body another things, (vii) does the Tathāgata exist after death or (viii) does he not exist after death or (ix) does he both (at the same time) exist and not exist and not not exist?' The Buddha replied: 'I have made no declaration with regard to these ten problems.'¹⁰⁶ Then Poṭṭhapāda asked:

'Why has the Exalted One made no declaration concerning these matters?'¹⁰⁷

'I have made no declaration concerning these matters because they do not lead to that which is connected with welfare, truth, or the leading of the Higher Life, to disenchantment (with the world), to the absence of desire, to calm, to thorough understanding, to the Highest Wisdom, or the Final Bliss (Nibbāna).'

'What, then, does the Exalted One teach?'

'"Suffering" is my teaching. "The Origin of Suffering" is my teaching. "The Cessation of Suffering" is my teaching. "The Way to the Cessation of Suffering" is my teaching.'¹⁰⁸

'Why does the Exalted One teach these things?'

'I teach them because they lead to that which is connected with welfare, with truth, with the leading of the Higher Life, to disenchantment (with the world), to the absence of desire, to calm, to thorough understanding, to the Higher Wisdom, and to the Final Bliss (Nibbāna). That is why I teach concerning them.'¹⁰⁹ In the same manner the Buddha dismissed those ten questions posed by Māluṅkyaputta, a young monk.¹¹⁰

Buddhism, therefore, does not provide an explanation of all the metaphysical problems that interest mankind. The Buddha explained whatever he thought was necessary in order to get rid of *dukkha* and not in order to satisfy curiosity. It is a means of deliverance and a doctrine of reality in which every encouragement is given to investigate the riddle of life. It is not necessary to indulge in idle speculation or theorizing: neither is faith demanded with regard to a first cause. This knowledge does not bring us any nearer to the goal; it only gratifies childish curiosity. Whatever other religions may teach, Buddhism does not speak about a first cause of life. Nevertheless it stresses the cause and effect with regard to the life continuum according to the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*). It clearly shows how the cause becomes the effect and the effect becomes the cause. The continuous recurring of birth and death which is called '*samsāra*' has been aptly compared to a circling. It is inconceivable to ascertain a beginning in such a circle of cause and effect; therefore, with regard to the ultimate origin of life, the Buddha declares:

'Without cognizable end is this recurrent wandering (*Samsāra*), a first beginning of beings who, obstructed by ignorance and fettered by craving, wander to and fro, is not to be perceived.'¹¹¹

One should not worry in vain seeking for a beginning in a beginningless past. Life is a process of becoming, a force, a flux and as such necessitates a beginningless past whether one is ape or man. One should seek the cause of this faring on and live in the present and not in the past. One should utilize one's valuable energy to transform the life stream into the sorrowless, *dukkhaless* state which is *Nibbāna*. As the life span is short one should try to learn only the important things. There is no time to waste: one may live a hundred years or more but this is not sufficient time to study more than a few subjects. A library contains books on many interesting subjects but we must select the most useful subjects and specialize in them. There is no time to devote to metaphysical speculation. Those who pose questions for the mere sake of argument defeat their own ends. One might argue

that life had a beginning and a finite past and that the first cause was a Creator-God. In that case there is no reason why one should not question who had created the creator. In other words, no first cause is to be found. Science does not care to investigate into the first cause simply because such an attempt is directly inimical to the advancement of knowledge. The law of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* does not investigate either, because the very conception of a first cause itself is a complete check in the progress of knowledge.

Sīla, Samādhi, Paññā

The teachings of the Buddha are authoritatively grouped under three headings; *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. A later addition appears to be *vimutti*, deliverance,¹¹² but the three originals were undoubtedly as stated. To appreciate the authority for the grouping as well as the nature thereof, it is necessary to consider the discourse in the sutta known as 'The Fruits of the Life of a Recluse' (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*)¹¹³ which, though stated in the text to have been delivered to King Ajātasattu of Magadha, son of Bimbisāra, must have been made originally at a much earlier date. According to modern chronology, Ajātasattu succeeded his father only about seven years before the *Parinibbāna* of the Buddha, whereas the address contained in the 'Fruits' sutta was quoted on many occasions, some of which date from the very early days of the Buddha's teaching career. It was clearly a standard address which the Buddha quoted at length, then referred to in order to emphasize or clarify the particular points under review. Moreover, if anything is to be argued from the order of the arrangement of the suttas in the *Dīgha Nikaya*, and at least the first thirteen of these, perhaps the first sixteen, are amongst the earliest of the Discourses that have come down to us, it appears that they were arranged by the compilers in an order which would produce a cumulative account of the Buddha's teachings. For the first of the sixteen we have the *Brahmajāla*, or 'Net of Brahmā', which contains the lengthy exposition of contemporary views, then the *Sāmaññaphala* which contains the exposition of the Buddha's. While other developments as,

for example, the Stages of the Path, the Enunciation of the Goal, the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, together with dissertations on the nature of true sacrifice, asceticism, and so on, follow in the course of the next sixteen suttas, the sixteenth being the *Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta*. In the meantime, *Sāmaññaphala* traces the development of the prospective Buddhist recluse from the time he decides to adopt the homeless life until he finally attains to realization of the Four Noble Truths. Rhys Davids points out in the Introduction to his translation of the sutta that though the 'fruits' mentioned contain only one that is 'exclusively Buddhist', yet 'the things omitted, the union of the whole of these included into one system, the order in which the ideas are arranged, the way in which they are treated as so many steps of a ladder whose chief value depends on the fact that it leads up to the culminating point of Nirvāṇa in Arahantship — all this is exclusively Buddhist.'¹¹⁴ In point of fact, the 'fruits', other than the realization of the Four Noble Truths, already existed in Brahman thought in stages varying from the most rudimentary to that of developed growth, so that the enumeration of the whole series formed the ideal basis from which to expound. In the course of the sixteen suttas are introduced the *Brahmavihāra*,¹¹⁵ also previously known to Brahmanic thought, and, what is far more important, almost the whole of the *Paññā* section is recast.¹¹⁶ For the present, however, we consider the *Sāmaññaphala* discourse as it stands in the sutta bearing that name.

We first have the recognition of the arising of an Arahāt in the present world, the hearing by an ordinary person of his teachings, and the decision of that person to adopt the homeless life. We then have the section on the *Silas*, or Moralities, the main ones of which are described in terms of the ordinary man's estimate of the Buddha. The text states that such a person would say:

'Having abandoned the taking of life and continued to abstain therefrom, the Samaṇa Gotama, who has laid the stick and sword aside, feeling shame now shows kindness to all beings; he lives their friend. Having abandoned the taking of that which is

not given, and continued to abstain therefrom, the Samaṇa Gotama, taking only what is given, waits for the gift. Committing no theft, he lives as one whose being is pure. Having abandoned the world and become a follower of the religious life, the Samaṇa Gotama lives away from the world and abstains from sexual intercourse. Having abandoned the speaking of falsehood and continued to abstain therefrom, the Samaṇa Gotama is a speaker of truth. Linked to truth he is reliable and trustworthy, never breaking his word to the world. Having abandoned slander and continued to abstain therefrom, the Samaṇa Gotama, having heard a thing in one place does not declare it in another to cause dissension to the people there. Or, having heard a thing elsewhere, he does not repeat it here to cause dissension with the people here. Thus to the disunited he is a conciliator; to the united he is one who strengthens the existing union. He takes delight in peace and his words make for peace. Having abandoned harsh speaking and continued to abstain therefrom, such is the Samaṇa Gotama; whatever words are pure, comforting to the ear, kind, reaching to the heart, gentle, gracious to the people, such is the quality of his words. Having abandoned trivial conversation and continued to abstain therefrom, the Samaṇa Gotama's words are timely, in accordance with the truth, and of things bearing advantage — of the Dhamma and the Discipline of the Order. His speech is as a hidden treasure. It is in accordance with the occasion, cumulative and endowed with gain.¹¹⁷ Other and minor moralities are recounted, these referring almost entirely to recluses, after which, with the bhikkhu complete in the Moralities, the discourse proceeds to the Samādhi section.¹¹⁸ Here are described the guarding of the doors of the senses, whereby the bhikkhu is restrained in his faculties; he no longer experiences covetousness, grief and evil things, but experiences 'within himself' an unimpaired ease. Samādhi includes also: mindfulness and awareness, contentment with simplicity, and the destruction of the Five Hindrances to mental development and vision.¹¹⁹ He now enters on the Jhānic states but the present sutta mentions only the *Rūpāvacara* Jhānas. The third section, *Paññā*, is entered upon with the following realization: 'This is

my body, possessing material qualities, formed of the four great elements, produced by mother and father, on accumulation of rice and fluid, a thing by its nature impermanent, fragile, perishable, and subject to total destruction; and this is my consciousness, bound up with and dependent on it.¹²⁰ The meditator then concentrates on the producing of a mind-made body, on acquiring psychic powers such as passing through rocks, walking on water, on attaining to supernatural hearing, on the knowledge of other people's thoughts, recollection of his own previous births, and on the knowledge of other people's previous births. The last concerns the acquiring of the purity of the Celestial Eye. From this point he proceeds to the realization of the destruction of the *āsavas* and so to the realization of the Four Noble Truths.¹²¹

Such were the terms in which the Buddha so frequently outlined his teaching. With regard to the amendments mentioned, the possible substitution of the *Brahmavihāras* for the Jhānic states, a much wider use of the term 'samādhi' than is here indicated, and a reconstruction of the *Paññā* section, these will be considered in connection with the Ultimate Ideal Aim. Returning to the authority on which the grouping into the sections of *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā* is based, we have the incident recounted in another of the early *Digha suttas*, namely, *Subha Sutta*, No. 10.

Shortly after the *Parinibbāna* of the Buddha, Venerable Ānanda was approached by Subha, a young man from Tudi, a village near Sāvatti and now in the territory of Nepal. Subha said to him: 'You, Ānanda, were for a long time the attendant of the Venerable Gotama, intimate with him, keeping near him. You would know what were the doctrines he extolled, the doctrines with which he aroused people and in which he established them. What are those doctrines?'¹²² Venerable Ānanda replied: 'There were three groups of that which the Exalted One extolled: the noble group relating to morality (*sīla*), the noble group relating to *samādhi*, and the noble group relating to *paññā*.' Venerable Ānanda then quoted the Moralities, concluding the section with the remark: 'And after that there is certainly more to be done.'¹²³ He then described *Samādhi*, concluding with the same

remark,^{123A} but after describing the *Paññā* sections he stated: 'And now there is indeed nothing further to be done.'¹²⁴

The placing of the Moralities as the first section of the Buddha's teaching is not incidental but is essential if the student is to proceed with the mind-culture which is the core of Buddhism. The Buddhist scriptures give frequent warnings regarding the extreme danger of attempting to experience states of mental concentration without thorough grounding in the practice of the Moralities. Any teachings that are issued or that have become extant — and many have done so of recent years — which do not insist on practice of the Moralities before embarking on exercises in mental concentration are fraught with disaster and are to be utterly condemned. At the same time, if the Moralities are to be kept to increasing degrees, then cultivation of *samādhi* and *paññā* are essential; the dictum of Soṇandaṇḍa,¹²⁵ endorsed by the Buddha, to the effect that morality is washed round with wisdom and wisdom with morality,¹²⁶ that these two together constitute the heights of the world, is incontrovertible. What cannot be maintained is that either morality or wisdom should exist independently of each other.

However, of the above address in *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, there is much that might be held to be too advanced for the ordinary layman. The *Dhammapada* tells us: 'The extent to which one is well versed in the Dhamma is not measured by the amount one talks, but if one has heard even only a little and really discerns the Dhamma through the mental body (intelligence), one is, indeed, well versed in the Dhamma who does not neglect it.'¹²⁷ The great point is, therefore, that one should understand what one hears or reads of it, and that one should put that into practice. Moreover, of the qualities which the Dhamma texts particularly stress should be cultivated are the two of energy and vigilance. 'Guard your own thoughts. Take delight in a vigilance. From a place difficult of access, pull yourself up as an elephant does out of the mud.'¹²⁸ One may quote: 'Vigilance is the way leading to the deathless state; negligence is the road to death. Those who are vigilant do not die; those who are negligent are as if dead already.'¹²⁹

The Noble Eightfold Path

In a very practical sermon known as the 'Discourse of Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Doctrine' (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*) — in fact, it was the first sermon given by the Buddha, at Isipatana near Banaras — he declared that those who wish to lead a pure life should avoid the two extremes of self-indulgence (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*) and self-torture (*attakilamathānuyoga*). He said: 'Self-indulgence is low, vulgar, ignoble and harmful, and self-mortification is painful, ignoble and harmful — both are profitless.'¹³⁰ In fact, the former surely retards one's spiritual progress and the latter weakens one's intellect.

Both of these erroneous doctrines of extremes were actually propounded by two religious groups at the time: the one, materialist (*Cārvāka*), and supporting hedonism; the other, believing in a transcendental self or soul bound to a material body which should be annihilated by severe ascetic practices in order to release the true self.

The Buddha himself put into practice both these doctrines before his Enlightenment: the first, when he was a prince in his father's palace before he renounced the world; second, as an ascetic in the Uruvelā forest prior to his Enlightenment. Hence, he realized their futility and discovered that only self-conquest in moderation leads to the ultimate goal — Nibbāna. *MIRVANA*

Avoiding the two extremes the Buddha, therefore, asked his followers to take the Middle Way (*majjhimāpāṭṭhāna*) which opens the eyes and bestows understanding, which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment.¹³¹ In fact, according to the four Noble Truths, (i) life is subject to sorrow (*dukkha*), (ii) this sorrow is caused by ignorance which results in desire — attachment (*samudaya*), (iii) this sorrow can be eliminated by the elimination of desire — attachment (*nirodha*), (iv) the path to eliminate desire — attachment (*maggā*). One can, therefore, put an end to sorrow by adopting and following the path — Middle Way — which to the Buddhist is the philosophy of life itself. This Middle Way of self-conquest, which leads to the ultimate goal is eightfold, namely: (1) Right Understanding (*Sammā-diṭṭhi*), (2) Right Thought (*Sammāsankappa*), (3) Right

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Speech (*Sammā-vācā*), (4) Right Action (*Sammā-kammanta*), (5) Right Livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*), (6) Right Effort (*Sammā-vāyāma*), (7) Right Mindfulness (*Sammā-sati*), (8) Right Concentration (*Sammā-samādhi*).

(1) Right Understanding: To begin treading the Path, we must see life as it is, in accord with its three characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and no-soul (*anattā*); we must possess a clear understanding of the nature of existence, of moral law, of the factors and component elements (*dhammas*) that go to make up this *Samsāra* or conditioned realm of life. In short, we must have the clear understanding of Twelve *Nidānas* or the Dependent Production (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and the Four Noble Truths. We should, therefore, make these the bases of our acceptance of the vicissitudes of life.

(2) Right Thought: This means that our mind should be pure, free from lust (*rāga*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), cruelty (*vihimsā*) and the like. At the same time, we should be willing to relinquish anything that obstructs our onward march and unselfishly transfer merit obtained to all sentient beings. Three other steps conjoin with and accompany Right Thought, namely: Right Understanding (1st step), Right Effort (6th step), and Right Mindfulness (7th step).

(3) Right Speech: By refraining from lying (*musāvā-dā*), back-biting (*pisunāvācā*), harsh talk (*pharusāvācā*), and idle gossip (*samphappalāpā*), we create a connecting link between thought and action. One, moreover, which is characterized by wisdom and kindness. Correct speech should not be unduly loud or excitable, not prompted by infatuation, ill-will or selfish interests; it should be free from dogmatic assertions and discrimination; finally, it should not be such as to inflame passions. Three steps are accompanied by Right Speech as in Right Thought.

(4) Right Action: This generally consists in observing

the Five Precepts, which can be shown in both their negative and positive aspects: (i) Not to kill but to practise love and harmlessness to all, (ii) Not to take that which is not given, but to practise charity and generosity, (iii) Not to commit sexual misconduct, but to practise purity and self-control, (iv) Not to indulge in false speech, but to practise sincerity and honesty, (v) Not to partake of intoxicating drinks or drugs which cause heedlessness, but to practise restraint and mindfulness.

It is important to notice that 'sexual misconduct' (*kāmesumicchācāra*) has wrongly been translated as 'adultery' on many occasions, whereas, the original Pali usage '*kāmesu*', being in the plural, denotes that *all* abnormal or illegal practices should be avoided in addition to any other practice or pursuit which tends to overstimulate any of the senses. For the ordinary disciple, moreover, it is essential for him to practise all these injunctions if he wishes to aspire to the higher life.

Particularly abstaining from taking life, from taking that which is not given and from sexual misconduct is Right Action. This is also conjoined with the first, sixth and seventh steps.

(5) Right Livelihood or Vocation The layman should only pursue an occupation that does not cause harm or injustice to other beings.

To practise deceit, treachery, soothsaying, trickery, usury are regarded as wrong living. The traditional trades from which the layman is debarred are: (i) dealing in arms, (ii) in living beings, (iii) in flesh, (iv) in intoxicating drinks, and (v) in poison.

He should be free from acquisitiveness or any connections with money-making legalized or otherwise, prostitution of any kind, and should have a sense of service and duty in life. As the 'homeless life' is the ideal state at which to aim, he should, although encumbered with family and business responsibilities, simplify his needs and devote more time to meditation.

First, sixth and seventh steps are conjoined with Right Livelihood in its practice.

(6) Right Effort: Self-perfection can be achieved by avoiding and rejecting ignoble qualities while acquiring and fostering noble qualities. This stage is, therefore, subdivided into five parts: (i) The effort to prevent the arising of evil which has not yet arisen, (ii) The effort to expel that evil which is already present, (iii) The effort to induce good which has not yet arisen, (iv) The effort to cultivate that good which is already present.¹³²

By conscientiously practising the above, the layman will be enabled to more easily cultivate the higher spiritual ideals, the best known formulation of this being termed the Ten Perfections (*Dasapāramitās*): (i) generosity (*dāna*), (ii) morality (*sīla*), (iii) renunciation (*nekkhamma*), (iv) wisdom (*paññā*), (v) energy (*virīya*), (vi) patience (*khanti*), (vii) honesty and truthfulness (*sacca*), (viii) determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), (ix) loving kindness (*mettā*) and (x) equanimity (*upekkhā*).

(7) Right Mindfulness: This implies a state of constant awareness with regard to the (i) body (ii) feelings (iii) mind and (iv) ideas engendered therein and is, in effect, an additional sense. The development of this type of mindfulness is necessary to prevent the practitioner from being led astray by erroneous views. Thus, it is the culmination of the intellectual process which links up with the intuitive process, namely *vipassanā* or direct insight into things as they truly are. This step marks a further advance from the stage when things were known only by the differing features each displayed, since here all such discrimination is discarded. Although things seem corporeal, good or bad, right or wrong, such attitudes as these only go to prove how the mind views things on an incomplete basis. The process of thoughts is only food for the intellect to enable the mind to diagnose the truth more clearly as such discriminating things first make themselves aware. Hence, we should

transcend the intellectual mind if we are to progress further and realize the true significance and relationship of all compounded things.

The above four Fundamentals of Mindfulness, practised and developed, bring the seven factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*) to full perfection; they are: (i) Mindfulness (*sati*), (ii) Investigation of the Law (*dhammavicaya*), (iii) Energy (*virīya*), (iv) Rapture (*pīti*), (v) Tranquillity (*passaddhī*), (vi) Concentration (*samādhi*), (vii) Equanimity (*upekkhā*).

(8) Right Concentration At the final stage, we should aim at one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) of mind directed towards a wholesome object. Through desire and craving, the root of all evil *kamma* is accumulated, making rebirth necessary. To overcome this process, we must understand that everything is impermanent, unsatisfactory and substanceless. True knowledge of this nature is acquired through the practice of meditation, of which there are two aspects: the active of practice, and the passive of realization of truths.

Of these components, the first two constitute *Paññā*, the next three *Sīla*, and the last three *Samādhi*. Clearly the components are not to be accounted as consecutive steps, but even though one takes the Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood components of the *Sīla* group first, in accordance with the order of the three sections *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā*, one remarks immediately that neither Right Speech nor Right Action, much less Right Livelihood, is possible without Right Understanding. The interrelation of the components is inevitable, and recognizing this one comes again to the strength of the Buddhist teaching, namely, that the Moralities are never an end in themselves; they are inextricably bound up with all the other components which form the path to final release from suffering. To what extent, then, is it necessary to study and develop them?

This is the Middle Way, the Buddhist's philosophy of life by which one lives and progresses in accord with the principles of

moderation and detachment. Once deliverance is thus obtained from suffering, and the freedom appreciated, it cannot be lost by those who have once won it. The first principle of all Reality is that whatever has a beginning must have an end. The Buddha said: 'Whatever is subject to arising must also be subject to ceasing.' (*Yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbam taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ*).¹³³ Suffering is no exception to this law.

The Texts of the Dhamma

The Buddhist scriptures are divided traditionally into three main groups known as 'baskets', '*piṭakas*', the Pali terms being *Vinaya*, *Sutta*, *Abhidhamma*, and the Sanskrit *Vinaya*, *Sūtra*, *Abhidharma*. Until the early part of the present century it was assumed that the Pali texts represented the only complete Canon, for though the discovery of the Hodgson MSS in Nepal in the 1830s and 1840s did bring to light some Sanskrit texts, it was not until the explorations of the very late nineteenth century and early twentieth that the one-time existence of a Sanskrit Canon became evident. Even so, the Nanjio Catalogue¹³⁴ listed 781 *sūtras*, including the *Āgamas*, in addition to 299 other *sūtras* originating between 960 and 1280 CE., 85 *Vinaya* texts, and 131 *Abhidharma* texts; another 342 titles classified as 'Miscellaneous' were also in it. These figures do not include Pali works since Nanjio was dealing largely with Chinese translation, but though some of the Pali texts correspond to some of the Sanskrit originals of the translations sufficiently to make it obvious that the works in question derived from a common source,¹³⁵ there is also evidence that some of the Sanskrit texts evolved independently of the Pali though the titles might seem to suggest a parallel.¹³⁶ A large quantity of Sanskrit texts have for long been known only in their Chinese and Tibetan translations, but more recent archaeological research and expert examination have made available the contents of such texts, as for example the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*¹³⁷ and the *Upatissa* commentary relating to *Vimutti*, or Deliverance (*Vimokṣamārgaśāstra*).¹³⁸ However, since all too little information is available concerning the Sanskrit works of dates comparable to those of the Pali, we examine in detail the