

# **BUDDHISM IN BRITAIN**

By Ven. Dr. H. Saddhatissa Thera

IT may be asked by people of Buddhist countries "**What is the trend of Buddhism in Britain today?**"

To such a question one could reply, "**Continual progress and quiet penetration into minds that seek to know.**" For teachers of Buddhism do not attempt to coerce, persuade or bribe others into the acceptance of the teachings; they merely offer it for personal consideration and investigation.

This is done by giving lectures wherever possible, by holding classes and by the distribution of literature when available. It is in this way that many have become acquainted with the Teaching who could not otherwise have heard of Buddhism at all.

We are happy to note that Buddhism has its adherents not only in the capital but also in the provinces. Several Buddhist groups and societies have been formed there and the number of members increases daily. There are Buddhist Societies in a number of British Universities.

Invitations are frequently received from Christian as well as other organisations to give lectures on the Teaching of the Buddha. These are accepted whenever possible. The talks are listened to with the greatest attention and are followed by questions and sometimes discussions.

On the other hand, there are those who become Buddhists through the medium of Buddhist literature without having attended any lectures at all. In most cases it is only by a chance remark that one learns that they have accepted Buddhism as their guide. Appreciating its sweet reasonableness, they are at the same time endeavouring to mould their lives accordingly.

## **Wider Contact**

In this age of swift travel and communications Europeans have been able to make contact with people of Buddhist lands to a greater extent than ever before; this has given an opportunity for a better understanding of each other's ideals and has thus encouraged the spirit of tolerance. Tolerance with regard to other religions is apparent even in the schools, the senior members of which have been asked to write essays on Religions other than their own, and they often choose Buddhism.

On various occasions members of literary, cultural, Religious and Educational societies in England, in parties of sixty or so ask to be allowed to visit the Vihara in London to see the shrine and to put questions relating to the tenets of Buddhism, Buddhist culture, Buddhist history and present day situation in Buddhist countries. They are keen to learn something of the Dhamma as it is found in the Buddhist Canon. So it is with those who attend classes: they feel the need to investigate the teaching thoroughly and to at least make some attempt to put it into practice.

### **Effect On The West**

What effect will Buddhism have on the people of the West, since many are becoming interested in the **Dhamma** taught by the Lord Buddha?

Is this interest a passing phase, or will it leave a lasting imprint on the minds of those who earnestly seek to know as it really is?

**During the last half-century such a spirit of hate, cruelty and ferocity has been let loose all over the world that many have felt the urge to enquire why this should be so. There is a desire to understand the why and the wherefore of existence, since their former faith in the Religion of their forefathers has been severely shaken.**

It is mostly to these thinking men and women that Buddhism appeals, for it is a Religion of reason and not one of blind faith. It shows a perfect way of living which will, if followed conscientiously break the bonds that bind men to the round of birth and death.

### **Unbalanced**

One cannot arrest the march of progress either in the social or spiritual world; yet one should seek a true balance rather than encourage either at the expense of the other. Unfortunately it is the latter that is happening at the present time. All over the world the state of society is unbalanced and, sooner or later a toppling must become inevitable.

THE NEED OF RELIGION IS OBVIOUS AND THE PRACTICE OF IT IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE. THERE IS NO REASON WHY WE SHOULD BE OBSESSED BY THE IDEA OF NUMBERS. IT IS QUALITY THAT COUNTS AND WE MAY BE REASONABLY SURE THAT WHERE THE BEST LEAD, THE REST WILL FOLLOW.

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