

BUDDHISM IN THE WESTERN WORLD

By The Ven. Piyadassi Thera

The Buddha lived in India in the 6th century before Christ. This was an age of intense intellectual and social activity in many parts of the world. A time of religious unrest, a time of experimentation, of bold investigation and high achievement in the realm of man's thought. The appearance of religious teachers and sages in the East and West, during this period was almost contemporaneous. It was the golden era or the peak period in the history of religions. History had witnessed radical changes in social and religious conditions in Greece and Rome. During this century, while Heraklitos was teaching the "Panta Rhei" doctrine or the flux theory, at Athens, Pythagoras was conducting his famous school.

In China there was Lao Tsu where his teachings, later became known as Taoism or "The Way of Nature", inspired some of China's finest minds. Confucius who appeared in the middle of the 6th century, established an ethical system based on the ancient customs and traditions of China, and his teachings became known as Confucianism (550-479 B.C.). In Persia, modern Iran, there was Zarathustra or Zoroaster as the Greeks termed him. Purity of thought, speech and deed constitute the pivotal doctrine of Zarathustra. In India, in the beginning of the 6th century, Mahavira, better known in Pali Canon of the Buddhists, as Niganta Nata Putta, was the exponent of Jainism which enjoins strict asceticism and ahimsa or boundless compassion, and proclaims the karma doctrine and the transmigration of souls.

The Buddha Gotama was a contemporary of Jaina Mahavira. He walked the highways and by-ways of India instructing, enlightening, and gladdening the many, and his teachings are now known as Buddhism. The Buddha himself called his teachings "Dhammavinaya", the doctrine and discipline.

Some prefer to call Buddhism a religion, others call it a philosophy, still others think of it as both religion and philosophy. It may be called a religion, but not in the sense of the word religion is understood in theistic religions, for in Buddhism there is no "belief in, reverence for, and desire to please a divine ruling power. No higher unseen power as having control of man's destiny".¹ Buddhism is atheistic in the sense of denying a Creator God, but that does not mean that Buddhism is void of spiritual feelings. For the Buddha there is no

¹ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1986

philosophy without practice. He denounces mere speculative reasoning, theoretical structures, and the mere acquisition and storage of knowledge. It may be more correct to call Buddhism a “Way of Life”. But that does not mean that Buddhism is nothing more than an ethical code. It is a way of moral, spiritual and intellectual training leading to complete freedom of mind, supreme release from bondage.

Buddhism is the most ethical of religio-philosophical systems known to man. Referring to the ethical teaching of the Buddha, a stern critic like the late Albert Schweitzer wrote. “In this sphere he gave expression to truths of everlasting value and advanced the ethics not of India alone but of humanity. He was one of the greatest ethical men of genius ever bestowed upon the world. The creator of the ethic of inner perfection”.²

Any account of Buddhism and its spread must inevitably cover vast expanses both of time and space. It is the story of a movement which had very small beginnings. With only a few followers at the beginning, it grew gradually to encompass the world influencing the destinies of over six hundred millions, almost one-fourth of the whole human race. In time it covered more than 2,500 years. Buddhism made such rapid strides chiefly due to its intrinsic worth and its appeal to the reasoning mind; but there are other factors that aided its progress. Never did the Dharmadutas, the messengers of the Dharma, use any iniquitous methods of spreading the doctrine. Buddhism penetrated to other countries peaceably without disturbing the creeds that were already there. Buddhist missions were carried on neither by force of arms nor by the use of any coercive or reprehensible methods. Conversion by compulsion was unknown and repugnant to the Buddha and his disciples.

Rev. Joseph Wain remarked: “Buddhism taught a life not by rule, but by principle, a life of beauty, and as a consequence, it was a religion of tolerance. It was the most charitable system under the sun. Never and nowhere had blood been shed for its propagation. It has never persecuted or maltreated those whose beliefs were different – a lesson that Christianity has yet to learn. The Buddha taught man to beautify the today and to sanctify now.”

Professor Rhys Davids wrote: “There is no record known to me in the whole of the long history of Buddhism throughout the many centuries where his followers have been for such lengthened periods supreme, of any persecution by the Buddhists of the followers of any faith.”

² Indian Thought and Its Development, P. 117

Buddhism was thus able to diffuse itself through a great variety of cultures throughout the world.

Buddhism which had its origin in the valley of the Ganges was propagated first by the Buddha himself and his Arahats disciples. During the first 200 years of its history, Buddhism was confined, more or less to the northern part of the Indian peninsula. Then came Asoka, unique among rulers of the world, who accepted the teachings of the Buddha, and endeavoured to educate the people of the world by spreading that teaching, especially the ethical aspects of it. He caused such ethical teachings to be engraved on rocks, and they became sermons on stones, not metaphorically but actually. Asoka was imbued with that great spirit of tolerance preached by the Buddha, and under his reign all other religions enjoyed absolute freedom without let or hindrance.

Realizing the immense benefit that humanity would derive from a teaching of compassion and wisdom like that of the Buddha, Asoka made all endeavours to spread the teachings of the Buddha outside India. There were disciples of the Buddha who followed their Master's injunction: "Go now and wander for the welfare and happiness of gods and men, and proclaim the life of purity." These monks were ready to undertake any mission abroad, though contact and communication in those days was most difficult and travel was full of peril. Aided by Asoka's unceasing missionary zeal and the effort, determination and courage of the Dharmadutas, messengers of the Dhamma, Buddhism spread to other countries. Asoka's record speaks of missions sent to the Hellenistic kingdoms of Asia, Africa and Europe – to Syria and Egypt; Cyrene, Macedonia and Epirus, to Bactria and through Central Asia to China.

It was during Asoka's time, 236 years after the passing away of the Buddha, that his own son Mahinda, the Arahats sage, introduced Buddhism to Ceylon where it flourishes even today, almost in its pristine purity after the vicissitudes of over twenty centuries. From Ceylon, Buddhism spread to Burma and Siam, modern Thailand and thence to Indo-China, and Annam. It was established in Tibet, spread to Nepal, Mongolia, and gained a firm foothold in China. Thence it penetrated to Korea, and was transmitted to Japan through the sea-route. It also spread to Java and flourished in Sumatra during the Sri Vijaya dynasty. Thus Buddhism expanded beyond the boundaries of India and became a world religion.

The history of Buddhism cannot be separated from the history of Eastern culture and Eastern society. Of all the influences that moulded the culture of Asia, Buddhism was the most profound. For more than 2,500 years Buddhist principles and ideals have coloured the thoughts and feelings of the people of the East.

The relationship between Buddhism and the Western world goes back to a period before the Christian era. It can safely be said that the relationship between Buddhism and the Western world existed even before the birth of Jesus. History tells us of an invasion of India by Alexander the Great of Greece in the 4th Century before Christ. Although the empire he founded soon faded away, and by 317 B.C. traces of Greek rule had vanished, it was an event that certainly brought about closer connection between the two countries, and that eternal separation between East-West that Rudyard Kipling sang of, had virtually disappeared. And there is no doubt that Indian culture together with Buddhist thoughts were transmitted to Greece by those Greek intellectuals who visited India from time to time and that Alexander himself inspired by Buddhist thoughts helped spread the teachings of the Buddha. As already mentioned Asoka's missions entered some of the territories of Greece with the message of the Buddha. Modern discoveries have proved that Asokan edicts were written not only in an Indian language in Brahmi characters, but in Greek and Aramaic (the language which Jesus spoke), indicating that the Greeks and Semitic races were interested in the words of the Buddha which were engraved on rocks by Asoka.

The Europeans, however, had glimpses of Buddhism when travellers and especially Christian missionaries sailed to the East from the 16th century. Of course, from these missionaries who went to the East to teach and "civilize" the Asians, and remove paganism from them, we cannot expect unbiased and authentic representations but distorted and misinterpreted versions of the clear-worded expositions of the Buddha. This is abundantly clear from the writings on Buddhism by the missionaries of the past. The general impression created was that Buddhism was a primitive religion of idol worship. Even today the errors are not remedied but followed to the very letter by some modern missionaries. It must, however, be mentioned that some Christian missionaries made valuable contributions to the knowledge of Buddhism in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

A religion becomes known as a world religion when it has expanded beyond the country of its origin. Today we have five world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. Religion, it must be said, is one of the few things that distinguishes man from all other beings. This is distinctively a human phenomenon and therefore should be treated by human means, from a human point of view with human feeling.

The term religion can be explained in diverse ways. Each creed will have its own interpretation and definition. The English word religion has a specific meaning attached to it. It seems to me that it is futile to attempt a definition of

religions. The field, however, of religions, is very wide, indeed. Religion now has a fully organized system of feeling, thought and institution, ceremony and ecclesiastical organisation and similar practices. At the beginning, however, there were no such organizations as we see today. No religion was organized, except perhaps, in the case of Islam which is only 1,300 years old, and the youngest of the major religions. With the passage of time, however, religion became institutional and organized. Today some of the religions of the world are not merely faiths that speak of man's salvation and the hereafter only, but have become whole civilizations with their institutions: social, educational, economic and even political.

Whatever religions are accepted and made use of by the Westerners are derived from Asia. It is interesting to note that all the living religions had their origin in Asia. For instance, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism in India; Taoism and Confucianism in China; Zoroastrianism in Iran; Judanism and Christianity in Israel, and Islam in Arabia.

At times, the Westerners, though perhaps not the serious thinkers among them, make bold to say that a religion like Buddhism or even Hinduism and Islam, which have their own historical and cultural background, belong to another cultural pattern different from theirs, and therefore, not suitable to the Westerner with quite a different background and outlook. But we know that Buddhism and Hinduism arose among Indo-European people of North India over 2,500 years ago, while Christianity, the predominant religion of the West, came from the Semitic tradition of the Middle East where Judaism and Islam too, had their origin. Consequently it is difficult to understand in what respect Semitic culture is similar or nearer to that of the West than Indian culture itself.

It is right to say that where religion is concerned, the Asians and the Europeans, including the Americans whose origin is in Europe, had common beginnings. Nevertheless, when Christianity penetrated to Western Europe and America through the Roman Empire it underwent much changes. The waves of materialism and the Western civilization pressed hard on Christianity, and the Church by gradual process, had to reform the Christian religion to suit the Western outlook.

Religions have to undergo certain changes in accordance with the ancient traditions, customs and outlook of a people, their historical backgrounds and climatic and geographical conditions, but that does not mean that the fundamentals of a religion should be sacrificed.

The earliest knowledge of Buddhism came to England, Germany, and other countries of Europe, through Buddhist books and not through Buddhist missions. Books were the missions.

The earnest study of Buddhism, and its gradual spread in the West really began in the early 19th century. A few eminent scholars studied Buddhism and Indian thought and wrote learned books on the history and doctrine of Buddhism in several European languages. These publications, notably those of the French Orientalist Eugene Burnouf, and of George Turner, a civil servant in Ceylon who in 1837 published his edition in Roman characters of the Mahavamsa (the Great Chronicle of Ceylon) with a translation, were pioneer European studies of Pali, and resulted in a slow but steady increase in Western study of Buddhism and Buddhist culture.

It must be said that England's contribution to the spread of Buddhism and oriental studies is very great. Special mention should be made of the savant T. W. Rhys Davids (1843-1922). He came to Ceylon in 1864 and while being there for eight years as a civil servant became interested in Pali and Buddhism; and with the guidance and instruction of the learned Sinhala monks, he studied both. On his return to England in 1872, he engaged himself in his oriental studies and worked with such eminent scholars like Victor Fausboll, Hermann, Oldenburg and Robert Childers. Childers like his friend Rhys Davids, also came to Ceylon in 1864, and worked as a civil servant. The publication in two volumes of his *Dictionary of the Pali language* (1872-1875) comprehensive for the times and a work still worth consulting, was his great contribution to the study of Pali.

In 1881 Rhys Davids was invited to give the Hibbert lectures in America. The memory of Rhys Davids is cherished by the Buddhist and those interested in Pali studies the world over because of his great contribution to the oriental studies in the West. The greatest contribution was the foundation of the Pali Text Society in 1881. This was an attempt to critically edit and print in Roman characters the Buddhist texts and the commentaries and translate them into English. His avowed object was to "render accessible to students the rich stores of the earliest Buddhist literature now lying unedited and practically unused in the various manuscripts scattered throughout the universities and other Public Libraries in Europe." He himself edited several of the Pali texts and translated some of them. He held the chair of Pali and Buddhist literature at London University, and was responsible for founding the London School of Oriental Studies.

In this connection mention also should be made of Mrs. Caroline Foley Rhys Davids, a woman of remarkable intelligence who not only assisted her husband

in his literary work, but herself edited and translated a number of Pali books or manuscripts and interpreted their contents, according to her convictions, which at times, were unfortunately not quite in harmony with the Buddhist tradition. Had it not been for the Pali Text Society, Theravada Buddhism would have been not so widely known, particular in the Western world. The Society has edited in Pali, in Roman characters, all the works in the Tripitaka, the Buddhist Canon, and many commentaries. Then there are the translations which have gone into several editions, and now these books have found a place in most of the university libraries in Europe, America, and in the Orient. In addition to these we now have the *Pali-English Dictionary*, the Magnum Opus of Professor Rhys Davids and his collaborator Dr. W. Stede: *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, and the *Pali Tripitaka Concordance*. The Danish Academy's new oriental Pali Dictionary though it will take years to complete, will be outstanding as a work of Lexicography. This dictionary was initiated by the Danish Pali Scholar of deep learning: V. Tenekner, and assisted by the Swedish Pali scholar Helmer Smith.

Max Muller who produced his voluminous *Sacred Books of the East*, "a series of translations from a variety of Eastern languages into English contributed by different scholars, encouraged Rhys Davids to begin the *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* on the closure of the Sacred Books of the East. This series is yet continuing. These scholars, and many others, whose names are not mentioned here, devoted themselves unsparingly to the study and spread of Pali and Buddhism. The work done by the Pali Text Society during the last 83 years, with the assistance of eminent scholars in the field of Pali studies, is colossal. Today this great work is successfully continued by its President, Miss I.B. Horner, a devoted and energetic scholar of international reputation.

It must also be said that extensive Buddhist academic studies have been done in several European countries, Germany and France in particular, and the scholars are continuing with unswerving determination their work in the field of Pali and Buddhist studies.

When we speak of Buddhism in Germany we must give the credit to Germans themselves for introducing Buddhism to Germany from Buddhist lands. As in the case of Britain, it was in early 19th century that Germany became aware of the more reliable version of Buddhism through publications by German, French and English Indologists. The *Dhammapada*, a book of the Buddhist Canon was translated with notes and excerpts from the Commentary, from Pali into Latin by the eminent Danish Scholar Fausball in 1855. This was the first transliteration of a Pali text, to be published in full, in Europe in the Roman characters with which the Europeans, for the first time became acquainted.

In the earlier days Germans were stimulated to study Buddhism owing to the works of the renowned philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer whose thoughts were influenced to a great extent by the teachings of the Buddha. Though his voluminous work “World as Will and Idea” is tinged with a note of pessimism which is contrary to the spirit of Buddhism, which teaches neither pessimism nor optimism, but the realistic view of life and the world, Schopenhauer’s philosophy influenced all people with inquiring minds. He kindled the minds of not only the Germans, but the people of Europe in General, by his writings which declared that Buddhism is the key to all the problems of life.

The first German translation of the Dhammapada by the noted Indologist Albert Weber appeared in 1860, and it was the first rendering of it into a modern Western language. In the field of translating the Pali scriptures into German the work of Karl Eugen Neumann, Oldenburg and the Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thera are outstanding. Among those who worked for the cause of Buddhism in Germany, names of the following are unforgettable: Paul Dhaike, a German physician who visited Ceylon eight times and studied Pali Buddhism, was a good practising Buddhist whose knowledge of the Theravada was remarkable. Most of his books available in English translated by Bhikkhu Silacara, have influenced the study of Buddhism among the English speaking people.

Paul Dhaike not only wrote authoritative books on Buddhism and translated Buddhist texts, and published several Buddhist journals, but after his return from the East founded a Buddhist House (Buddhistisches Haus) in 1924 in Frohnau, Berlin, on a beautifully situated plot of land 75 acres in extent. It was this land that the German Dharmaduta Society of Colombo purchased in 1957, and which presently houses the Ceylon Mission.

The Ven. Nyanatiloka lived the life of a Buddhist monk in Ceylon for over 50 years and passed away in Ceylon at the age of 79. He was the first ordained Bhikkhu of German origin, and also the first from Continental Europe. He not only wrote numerous books both in German and English but also founded in 1911 the Island Hermitage on a lake at Dodanduwa in South Ceylon. This hermitage has been the training centre for the last 50 or more years for many a European who sought ordination for the study and practice of Buddhism under the leadership and guidance of the Ven. Nyanatiloka. Even today there reside in this hermitage Europeans, mostly German and American monks.

Mention should also be made of the Ven. Nyanaponika Maha Thera, a distinguished pupil of the Ven. Nyanatiloka. Following in the footsteps of his teacher, the Ven. Nyanaponika is ably continuing the work of his predecessors, engaging himself in translation activities. His endeavour to spread Buddhism,

especially through the Buddhist Publication Society of Kandy, Ceylon has been an outstanding success.

Oldenburg, Max Muller, Wilhelm Geiger, Kurt Schmidt, George Grimm, Kurt Seidenstuecker, Von Glaasenapp, Waldsschmidt and Winternitz are some of the tireless workers who translated Buddhist works into German and wrote books on Buddhism stimulating many to study the Buddha's teaching.

The Interest in Buddhism kindled by such savants like the French Orientalist Eugene Burnouf, German philosopher Schopenhauer, English Orientalist Rhys Davids, spread throughout Europe and America, and as a result, the study of Buddhism and Buddhist scholarship was continued by a learned body of Indologists and Orientalists.

The French tradition established by Burnouf and Sylvan Levi is continued by such eminent scholars like Paul Demiville, Louis Renou and others. Sylvan Levi's pupil, the Belgian Indologist Louis de La Valle Poussin, and his pupil, Etinne Lamotte and Dutch scholars like K. Kern, J. W. De Jong and G. Tucci of Italy and in Russia, scholars like Vaailieff, Minayeff and Stecherbatsky and several others have been greatly instrumental in promoting the study of Buddhalogy and oriental thought.

In the United States of America in the late 19th century, the Harvard Oriental Series was founded by Charles Rockwel Lanman and his pupil Henry Clarke Warren in order to interest the West more on the ancient wisdom of the East, and to bring about mutual understanding between the two spheres. In this series several Buddhist books have been translated from the Pali into English. Warren's Buddhism in translation in 1896, Eugene Watson Burlingame's *Buddhist Legends* which is an English translation of the Pali Dhammapada Commentary, in 1921, and the *Sutta-Nipata* translation of Lord Chalmers are outstanding contributions.

In his effort to present Buddhism to the Western reader, Warren included in his work the life of the Buddha, his teaching and his Monastic Order, all taken directly from the original Buddhist texts thus making it authentic. This work enjoys a wide circulation in America, Europe and in the Orient, and nearly half of the work is included in the Harvard Classics. Commenting on the man and his work, Lanman says:

“The timeliness of the Harvard Oriental Series as a whole is an eloquent tribute to the discernment of my loved and unforgotten pupil and friend, Henry Clarke Warren. In him were united not only the will and the ability to establish such publication, but also the learning and insight which enabled him to forecast in a

general way its possibilities of usefulness. We knew that the East had many a lesson to teach the West; but whether the lesson be repose of spirit or hygiene of the soldier in the field; whether it is the divine immanence or simplicity of life or the overcoming of evil with good, he knew that the first lesson to be taught us was that teachable habit of mind. If the judgement be right, if these purposes have been measurably attained - then Warren is worthy to be remembered not only as a scholar, but also as a man of patriotic and practical public service.”

Mention should also be made of the late professor Edgerton of Yale University who made a valuable contribution to Sanskrit Buddhist studies through his Buddhist *Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, Reader and Grammar, published in 1953, and Dwight Goddard, an American Buddhist who wrote “*A Buddhist Bible*”.

Even before the introduction of Buddhism to the United States, Henry Steele Olcott, an American who fought on the federal side in America’s civil war, came to Ceylon in the year 1880 and established the Theosophical Society, and worked for the revival of the Buddhist religion, Buddhist Culture and education which were fast disappearing after centuries of foreign domination. Olcott’s services are too well known to be repeated here.

It could be said with confidence that the introduction of Buddhism to the United States occurred at the World’s Parliament of Religions held in the City of Chicago in 1893 at which the late Anagarika Dharmapala of Ceylon, a close collaborator of Colonel Olcott, represented Buddhism, C.T.S. Strauss of New York, who later wrote books on Buddhism, was probably the first American to accept Buddhism. He received the three Refuges and the five precepts from Dharmapala. During this time, it is said that a Japanese Buddhist Mission, for the first time, arrived in San Francisco, and commenced Buddhist activities there.

The first Buddhist mission to England came on April 28, 1908, led by none other than the Ven. Ananda Metteyya, an English monk formerly known as Charles Henry Allan Bennet, who received his ordination as a Bhikkhu in Burma and devoted his life for the cause of Buddhism. It was Sir Edwin Arnold’s “Light of Asia” that attracted Allen Bennet to Buddhism at the age of 18.

The Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland was founded on November 26, 1907 to assist the Buddhist Mission. This society which functioned until 1923 was replaced in 1924 by the present Buddhist Society of which Mr. Christmas Humphreys is the President from its very inception.

In England, Ven. Ananda Metteyya was assisted by a body of scholars and enthusiastic supporters such as Dr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids, Sir Edwin Arnold and Dr. E. R. Rost to mention a few. The Ven. Ananda Metteyya in his saffron robe, graceful and dignified made a great impression on the people who came to him to discuss Buddhism, and those who had already had some idea of the new religion, through books, became Buddhists. Francis Payne who later worked hard for the cause of Buddhism in England, with his wife and children were the first to be admitted to the fold of Buddhism.

A careful survey of the history of Buddhism in the West reveals that Buddhism has been in the hands of a few scholars who were dealing with this “living religion” from a purely academic standpoint. Conditions have now changed and Buddhism seems to have taken a new turn. As more Buddhist literature has become available in the West, and as Buddhist missions from time to time, have in a modest way, acquainted the people of the West with the teachings of the Buddha, Europeans and Americans have come to understand that Buddhism is not only a mere doctrinal system, but a way of life, an inexhaustible storehouse of knowledge, the religious foundation for a civilization of international importance. We must not, however, forget the fact that this new turn is largely due to the selfless labours of the scholars of the last hundred years.

Many changes have taken place in the West in the near past. There is a growing interest in Buddhism both Theravada and Mahayana. Scores of Buddhist societies, centres and groups and several viharas or temples, or as they are generally called in America “Buddhist Churches” have been founded. Some are flourishing and some are not. Books of all types and sizes on different aspects of Buddhism, authoritative or otherwise, and many Buddhist journals and periodicals have appeared in their thousands.

Buddhism has secured a home in England. The Buddhist Society of London which celebrated its 40th anniversary recently and the two viharas which deserve special mention have done a great deal of work to bring Buddhism to Britain.

Today in many of the larger cities of Germany there are Buddhist Societies, the biggest is in Hamburg. The members are active and they support the “House of Stillness”, which is outside the city, for classes, seminars, lectures and meditation. In Germany three Buddhist journals are being published. Many books, a large number in paper backs, have been printed which have a great demand. As in other countries in the West, here in Germany, books play an important role in the slow but steady dissemination of Buddhism.

There are about 2,000 registered members of Buddhist Societies. It has been estimated that in the whole of Germany there are about 20 to 25 thousand Buddhists and about another 20,000 are interested in Buddhism.

Buddhism has now penetrated to the Scandinavian countries, too, though on a small scale. Ever since the Ven. Narada Maha Thera visited Sweden some ten years ago there has been a growing interest in Buddhism there. His visit and his lecture tour stimulated those interested in Buddhism so much, that they organized a Buddhist Society thereby enabling those who had an inclination for the study of Buddhism, to get acquainted with the fundamental teaching of Buddhism. Messrs Cerutti and Johannesson who have been to Ceylon, were instrumental in the continuance of the activities of the society with its headquarters in Gothenburg. In recent times Sister Amita (formerly Mrs Wagner) who is the leader of a society called the "Friends of Buddhism" has taken a keen interest in Buddhist activities.

When speaking of Buddhism in the Western world one would also like to briefly mention Australia, though strictly speaking, the Western world does not include Australia.

The Buddha's teachings penetrated to this country comparatively in recent times. The few ardent workers are doing their best slowly, but steadily, disseminate the message of the Master, both by way of lectures and discussion groups and by distributing Buddhist literature. At present there are only a few hundred Buddhists in Australia.

The Buddhist Federation of Australia takes in its fold the branch societies in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, the most active being the New South Wales Society at Sydney. The Federation's Journal: "METTA" is an international Buddhist organ which strengthens the cordial fellowship of the Australian Buddhists in the outside world. The successful progress of Buddhist activities in Australia is mainly due to the untiring and enthusiastic efforts of Mr. Charles P. Knight ably assisted by Mrs. N. Jackson.

I myself had the opportunity of visiting Australia in 1965 when the Buddhist Society of Melbourne invited me to deliver a series of talks on Buddhism. In all these countries, it is with difficulty and hardship that the Buddhist activities are kept alive. The few workers deserve a word of praise for their efforts and unabated enthusiasm.

The United States of America enjoys a high degree of religious freedom. Religion and the state do not go arm in arm in this country. There are some 265 religious sects in the United States, listed in the 1960 Year Book of American

churches. American society is pluralistic in its nature, and people seem to enjoy freedom of thought and expression. It was one of America's Presidents, Jefferson, who said: "The mass of mankind was not born with saddles on their backs, nor a favoured few booted and spurred ready to ride them legitimately by the grace of God."

In the United States there are over 190,000 Buddhists of whom a large number is of Chinese and Japanese descent; and majority of the temples are on the West Coast, in California. Buddhism in the States is predominantly Mahayana. The Japanese *Jodo Shin* and *Zen* are popular sects not only in the States but in Canada and Brazil, too.

However, those Americans who are more concerned with the original teachings of the Buddha, in other words, the central conception of Buddhism, and the Noble Eightfold Path, direct themselves for the study of Theravada, that is, early Buddhism or Pali Buddhism.

In many American Universities there are departments of religions where Buddhism is one of the subjects of study, and in Wisconsin University there is even a chair for Buddhism. At these universities religion is discussed from different angles. At Harvard University, for instance, the students are encouraged to survey the subject from a psychological, philosophical, sociological, and historico-evolutionary approach, and to study the academic, theological and moral problem in religious diversity.

Unlike in colleges of many countries, both in the East and West, most of the colleges in the States encourage the study of comparative religion. Students take delight in studying and discussing different religions of the world. I had the opportunity of visiting universities, colleges, churches, synagogues and various other institutions, religious and secular, and of speaking at these centres about Buddhism. This does not mean that many hundreds of Americans are becoming Buddhists. They study Buddhism and other religions to understand better the religious and cultural background of the people in the East. It must, however, be said that many Americans are personally interested in Buddhism. They have realized that Buddhism is a "warmer" teaching than they thought it to be. The Freedom of thought and expression stressed in Buddhism and its call to the inquirer, "to come and examine" and not merely to believe, and the non theocentric conception of Buddhism, fascinate many Americans.

Today we are living in an age of science – an age where man is inclined to accept the truth of anything by observation and experiment rather than by mere belief. With the recent advances of science, man is becoming more and more rationalistic in his outlook, and blind belief is fast disappearing. Whatever the

critics of Buddhism may say, the dispassionate student of early Buddhism, will realize, that the basic principles of Buddhism are in harmony with the findings of science. The scientific outlook is emphasized in Buddhism when the Buddha says to the sceptic and the inquiring mind, “this doctrine is to be examined to be seen and not to be merely believed.”

Observation and experiment which is a fundamental method of science, has a prominent place in Buddhism. The Buddha declared the Dhamma freely and equally to all. He kept nothing back and never wished to extract from his followers blind and submissive faith in him and his teaching. He insisted on observation and experiment, discriminative examination and intelligent inquiry. In no uncertain terms did he urge critical investigation when he addressed the inquiring *Kalamas* in a discourse that has been rightly called the first charter of free thought.

The Noble Eightfold Path which consists of Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, which is Buddhism in practice, is a teaching for free man. It has no labels, it knows no limit of time, space or race. It is for all time. Each person who lives the Dhamma brings it to light, can see it, and experiences it himself. It cannot be communicated to another for it has to be self-realized.

Prof. Rhys Davids was only emphasizing the teachings of the Buddha as Way of Life when he said:

“Buddhist or not Buddhist, I have examined every one of the great religious systems of the world, and in none of them have I found anything to surpass in beauty and comprehensiveness, the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that Path.”

Today the Buddhists, and others who are interested in Buddhism in the West, are more concerned with the practical aspect of Buddhism. They have realized that Buddhism is a living force and not a dry philosophy.

Mrs. C.A.F. Rhys Davids commenting on the Sigala-sutta, a discourse on Buddhist ethics, says:

“The Buddha’s doctrine of love and goodwill between man and man is here set forth in a domestic and social ethics with more comprehensive detail than elsewhere.... And truly we may say now even of this Vinaya, or code of discipline, so fundamental are the human interests involved, so sane and wide is the wisdom that envisages them, that the utterances are as fresh and practically

as binding today and here as they were then at Rajagaha. ‘Happy would have been the village or the clan on the banks of the Ganges, where the people were full of the kindly spirit of fellow-feeling, the noble spirit of justice which breathes through these naïve and simple sayings’. Not less happy would be the village or the family on the banks of the Thames today, of which this could be said.”

The Message of the Deer Park has revolutionized the thought and life of the human race. Though this message was delivered 2,512 years back at Sarnath, Benares, it has now penetrated peaceably to the remotest corners of the earth instructing and guiding mankind on the Path to Deliverance.