

HOMAGE TO THAT BLESSED ONE, THE PERFECT ONE, THE BUDDHA SUPREME

By T. H. Perera

LIFE AS IT REALLY IS

“No doer of the deeds is found;
No one who ever reaps their fruits
Empty *phenomenon* rolls on.
This is the only right view”.
= The Path of Purity (Visuddhi Magga) –

Wherever life manifests itself, from the highest Brahma realm to the lowest Avici Hell, it is entirely as well as intrinsically involved in Dukkha.

The Buddha says: *yaan aniccam tam dukkham*, which means: whatever is subject to change, to impermanence is Dukkha.

It is this Dukkha which is the central theme of my Essay. I shall employ it intact, and clarify its meaning in the course of developing my subject.

Based on the English Translation of Dukkha as suffering or sorrow or pain, some of our good and worthy friends have *calumniated* the All-Enlightened One as a Pessimist and His Teaching as Pessimism; while others have glorified Him with the epithets Optimist and His Teaching as Optimism.

Neither cognomen is applicable to the Tathāgatha (one who has thus come), this Unique Being, the Extraordinary Man (*āchariya manussā*).

Suffice it to say that “Ignorance is the greatest Taint” (Dhammapada V.293).

Much water has flowed under the Kelani Bridge since this erroneous translation, this misinterpretation of the word Dukkha-Dukkhe, the First Noble Truth, pregnant with the taste of Deliverance (*vimutti*).

At Page 67, the Poems of Joy (*Udāna*) will refresh your memory in this wise:-
“Just as, O Monks, the mighty ocean is of one flavour, the flavour of salt, even so, O Monks, the Dhamma is of one flavour, the flavour of *Deliverance*.”

Did I mention Kelani? Yes, the Kelani River which has its source beneath the sacred mountain peak Sri Pada, the Buddha’s footprint.

Addressing a certain Brahmin, the Blessed One said: “O Brahmana, Life is just like a mountain river flowing far and fast, taking everything with it. There is no

moment, no instant, no second, when it stops flowing, but it goes on flowing and *continuing*".

The Ratthapala Sutta (Majjhima 62) speaks of four summaries (*Dhammadesa*) of the Teaching of the Buddha to illustrate Life as it really is:-

Summary 1. ("Life in any) world is unstable, it is swept away".

Summary 2. ("Life in any) world has no shelter and no protection."

Summary 3. ("Life in any) world has nothing of its own, it has to leave all and pass on".

Summary 4. ("Life in any) world is incomplete, is insatiate and the slave of Craving".

At the very beginning of this Essay I quoted the Buddha as having used Dukkha to mean change or impermanence. Let me now take you to where it all began. On the eve of Wesak Full-Moon Day, The Ascetic Siddhattha (the Buddha-to-be) *winded* his way to Gaya and sat beneath the shade of a pipal tree-henceforth called the Bodhi-Tree of Enlightenment. He sat beneath its ample shade and with mind tranquilised He meditated right through the night.

At dawn, time when the Sun's earliest rays began to peep through the whispering leaves of the pipal tree, the Ascetic Siddhattha gained the highest attainment available to Man. He sat radiating the rays of a Supremely Enlightened One (*sammā sambuddha*). He saw Life as it really is.

Thereafter, He arose redolent, resplendent, radiant, brimming over with joy, He gave utterance to this terse but meaningful sentence:-

Idam pi dukkham – Here, indeed, is Dukkha.

Clarifying this statement, the All Enlightened One, raising His voice high, spoke these words to be heard by the entire Universe, beginning with the words:-

Aneka jāti samsāram – (Dhammapada V.V. 153-154).

For the benefit of those who are not well versed in Pali, I shall quote its English Translation by Sir Edwin Arnold.

"Many a house of Life

Hath held me – seeking ever him who wrought

These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught;

Sore was my ceaseless strife!

But now,
Thou Builder of this Tabernacle – Thou!
I know thee, never shall thou build again
These walls of Pain,
Nor raise the roof-tree of Deceits, nor lay
Fresh rafters on the clay;
Broken thy House is, and the ridge-pole split!
Delusion fashioned it!
Safe pass I thence, Deliverance to obtain”.

- The Light of Asia –

The Blessed One saw with His All-Enlightened Eye, this phenomenon called a “Being” or a “Person” or an “I” as a combination of ever changing: of ever afloat psycho-physical (*nāma-rūpa*) mental and material energies. They flow together, they are inter-dependent and very co-operative.

This “Being” thus brought together, He divided into five aggregates, in Pali *pāncakkhandha*, *khandha* means an aggregate.

What are these five aggregates? They are: 1. The aggregate of matter (*rūpakkhandha*) 2. The aggregate of sensations (*vedanakkhandha*). 3. The aggregate of perceptions (*sannakkhandha*). 4. The aggregate of mental formations (*sankhāraakkhandha*). 5. The aggregate of consciousness (*vinnanakkhandha*).

The All Enlightened One analysed each of these aggregates as far as analysis permits. His analysis of this so-called “Being”, or “I” or “Person” brought together by the five aggregates revealed: 1. None is permanent. 2. Each is in a state of constant flux. 3. One thing disappears yielding place to the arising of another in a series of cause and effect. 4. There is the deed, no one behind the deed to be called an I or an ego or a soul. 5. Every one of them is insubstantial. 6. There empty, insubstantial, hollow five-fold aggregates are synonymous with LIFE – *Idam pi dukkham* – This indeed is DUKKHA, the First Noble Truth.

In the four summaries already referred to, we came across the words “slave of craving”, craving (*tanhā*) as you are aware is the cause of the Arising of Dukkha – the second Noble Truth.

Craving in its intensified form is called grasping (*upādāna*). It is the insatiate urge present in the human personality to have to hold and to possess.

The Blessed One introduced *Upādāna* to the *Pannacakkhandhā* and succinctly called this combination The Five Aggregates of Grasping are Dukkha (*sankhittena – pancūpādānakkhandhā Dukkha*).

This is a subject which requires investigation and considerable elucidation. Herein lies the open sesame to fresh Becoming, to wanderings in life (*samsara*).

Permit me to draw your attention to the most profound of all the Teachings of the Buddha Supreme as embodied in the Mahanidāna Sutta (Dīgha Nikāya) entitled the Dependent Origination (*Paticca-samuppādā*) also called the Wheel of Life.

I shall extract from the Dependent Origination the necessary data to support the present context:- through Craving conditioned is Grasping. Through Grasping conditioned is the Process of Becoming (*bhava*). Through the Process of Becoming is conditioned Rebirth (*jāti*). Through Rebirth conditioned is Dukkha ingrained in the human personality, along with ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkhatā*) and suffering by way of change (*viparināmo-dukkha*).

A close and diligent study of the Dependent Origination will reveal that our present dukkha-bound life is the result of life affirming volitions (*cetanā*) of a previous life, and, vice versa, our life to come will depend on our present life affirming volitions.

The Buddha-Dhamma, the Teaching of Reality has to be studied (*pariyatti*), it has to be lived in, it has to be practised, study and practice lead to the realisation of (*pativedha*) of the Truth of Dukkha, its Arising, its Cessation and the Path leading to the Cessation, by employing your own intuitive knowledge and vision.

I take strong exception to the word Buddhism which is used to mean the Buddha-Dhamma or the Teaching of the Buddha. It certainly is not an ism in the sense of conflicting speculative views (*ditthi*). The Buddha-Dhamma is a way of life.

The Buddha does not say: “Believe in me and thou shalt be saved”. He invites investigation (*ehi-passiko*). Please read the Kalama Sutta. The final exhortation to the Kalamas is: “Do not accept anything thinking that the ascetic is respected by us, and, therefore it is right to accept his word”. (Ang.Vollp189).

And the Way of Life is the Buddha’s Middle Way – the Noble Eightfold Path – the Ancient Path, which the Buddha’s of the past traversed and, the Buddhas yet to come will traverse, the Ancient Path is immortalised in this Verse:-

“To cease from all evil,
To do what is good,
To cleanse one’s mind,
This is the Teaching of all the Buddhas”.

Herein is found the tripartite division of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely: 1. Purity of moral habits. 2. Purity of Consciousness. 3. Purity of super-consciousness. In Pali, *Sila*, *Samādhi* and *Panna*.

These three divisions of the Ancient Path are incorporated in the Buddha’s address delivered to the members of the First Buddhist Mission, “Go ye, O Monks, preach the Dhamma excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle and excellent in its consummation”.

With all due respect and humility I call upon you to proceed assiduously along the Path of Purity, putting forth “human strength, human energy and human striving”. The day then will assuredly come when you yourself will realise the Truth of Dukkha.

At the moment you realise the Truth of Dukkha, you enter the Stream (*sotāpatti*). You are a *Sowan* (*sotāpanna*). You are no more a worldling. You are a Noble One. The immediate fruit (*phala*) of entering the Stream is you get a glimpse of Nibbana. Sadhu! You are taken along the stream to the second stage that of a Once-Returner (*sakadāgami*). Proceeding along the Stream you arrive at the third stage – that of a Non-Returner (*anāgamin*). With Arahantship attained, the final stage on the Stream, you triumphantly rejoice on your Great Victory, “Destroyed is birth, brought to a close is the Walk towards the Supreme, done is what has to be done, there is no more of being such or such” (*Samyutta iii-66*).

“There is no more of such or such” – that is to say there shall be no Fresh Becoming (*jāti*), no Rebirth – *NIBBANA*.

However, being still alive you bear with you the Upādana – begotten Pancakkhandha. This I called *Upadisesa Nibbana* (Nibbana with upedi remaining). At the end of the present life span you enter into *Anupadisesa Nibbana* – Nibbana with no Upadana.

Dear Reader, permit me to conclude this Essay with a classic verse from the inimitable pen of Sir Edwin Arnold:-

“THE ACHING CRAZE TO LIVE ENDS AND LIFE GLIDES –
LIFELESS – TO NAMELESS QUIET, NAMELESS JOY,
BLESSED NIRVANA, SINLESS STIRLESS REST –
THAT CHANGE WHICH NEVER CHANGES!”

- The Light of Asia –

MAY YOU ALL BE BLESSED WITH THE UNCONDITIONED NIBBANA.

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