

# THE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF BUDDHISM

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*The author believes that the principles on which Buddhism is founded are scientific principles. "Buddhism", he says, "is a system of thought, a methodical approach of all the factors of experience and objective and subjective knowledge. Its purpose is the attainment of that higher insight which enables us to penetrate the veil of ignorance or illusion and free ourselves from each and every fetter that binds us to the cycles of suffering we endure in the ceaseless round of Samsara.... That is why it is unique among religions, and the only form of religious teaching that can survive the critical examination of a scientific mind."*

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Scientific thought to-day is at so many points touching the fringe of philosophy and metaphysics that it seems inevitable that within the next few decades the barrier which has for so long held them apart, and in some sense in opposition, must be broken down. We have reached the stage when we can justly ask ourselves whether the scientific and the religious approach to life and its problems are as incompatible as we have been led to believe. Religion, we have been told, is founded on faith; science on reasoned investigation. But this is only partly true; the activities of the human mind are not so sharply demarcated as the generalisation would suggest.

To assert that scientific knowledge is solely obtained from objective study of phenomena or from inductive generalisations based directly on experience is to over-simplify a highly complex process of the mind in which free speculation also has a part. The major scientific developments originate from the untrammelled activity of the human mind. As an example we may take the case of Einstein and his General Theory of Relativity, one of the most revolutionary contributions to modern thought. On his own showing, Einstein started out with a free creation of thought, by choosing, on philosophical principles, those mathematical equations which possessed a quality called co-variance. From those equations he made a further selection by working on another philosophical principle; that nature is the realisation of the simplest conceivable mathematical ideas. On this theory he obtained ultimately a set of equations which he put forward as the general equations of the universe.

To complete the system thus founded, a great deal more mathematical work was involved. He had to discover what observable consequences could be deduced from the equations, and finally he was able to predict certain definite phenomena which, according to his theory, ought to happen, such as the bending of light-rays by the sun. These were phenomena that could be, and had to be, tested by observation. But the point is that the checking by the objective methods came in only at the last stage of the process, not at its beginning. The General Theory of Relativity was, in its primary stage, a purely intellectual construction, in which observation and experiment played no part whatever. This has been emphasised by Einstein himself. "In a certain sense, therefore," he has declared, "I hold it true that pure thought can grasp reality".

This is precisely what Buddhism asserts, and has proclaimed over the past two thousand years. The many ways in which scientific thought, with its picture of a universe in an unstable condition of flux, approximates to the Buddhist philosophical concept is too vast a field to be covered in one article; volumes would be needed to deal with it adequately. Properly understood, however, the entire system is comprehended in the three definitions. "Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta". Anicca is universal flux; Dukkha is universal instability; Anatta is the absence of essential reality in compounded phenomena and relative concepts.

It is clear that science is not entirely based on empirical observation, and that not all religions are founded on blind faith and unwarranted assumptions. Science has its element of assumption; religion has its share of objective investigation. There is a point where they must meet. That point is in the doctrine taught by the Tathagata Buddha, which is a logical system, progressing from the recognition of subjective and objective facts to the realization of that which lies beyond intellectual comprehension.

In India from the earliest times Philosophy, Religion and Science were closely interwoven; the distinctions we have made between them were unknown. In some schools of thought, it is true, this led to a great deal of confused theorising, and the difference between fact and imaginative speculation became obscured. Imaginations tended to run riot in mysticism, and what the Lord Buddha called "a jungle of theories" – theological, occult and some frankly materialistic – came into being.

Hence the Buddhist insistence on discrimination which, established strongly by the Buddha Himself, remained ever afterwards a distinguishing feature of Buddhism in contrast to the religions of blind, unquestioning faith. It is the unique feature of Buddhism, the liberty of individual thought and freedom of self-determination within the framework of a logical morality, that places it fundamentally in agreement with the scientific attitude to life as we understand it to-day.

Within the past half century scientific thought has travelled a long way. Those who believe that materialism is the last work in scientific belief are already very much behind the times. Philosophers and scientists of international repute are at last coming to grips with the as-yet-unknown factors of life; they are not prepared to admit the dogmas of revealed religion, but they are no longer reluctant to acknowledge the existence of realms beyond the materialistic comprehension. In fact, many have declared the materialist viewpoint untenable in the light of modern physics. As a scientific theory, materialism is dead; it only survives as a political doctrine, in support of which genuine scientists are being forced to falsify and distort their discoveries in the effort to make them agree with an obsolete dogma of fifty years ago which has been adopted as a political religion.

In those parts of the world where scientific and religious thought alike are allowed full liberty, research bodies composed of doctors, physicists, biologists, psychologists and other specialised experts have been set up for the purpose of investigating telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, spiritualist manifestations and other classes of psychic phenomena. The results have been profoundly significant. The evidence for telepathy (thought-transference) is now so firmly established that it is being used as a recognised scientific explanation of other psychic activities, though its precise nature is not yet known. An instance of this occurred recently when a scientist, one of a board set up for the investigation of spiritualism in England, reported that most of the phenomena by the “medium” in a trance state could be ascribed to telepathy, and that they were no proof of the persistence of an immortal spirit. For the Buddhist, the importance of this lies not in the denial of surviving entity, which is in accordance with Buddhist teaching, but in the matter-of-fact acceptance by a scientist of an unknown mental power that functions independently of material media. Not only has telepathy been accepted thus, but experiments carried out in America have proved beyond dispute that the mind has the power of affecting the body, and even to a certain extent of controlling objects at a distance without any physical connection. These tests are carried out on selected subjects by means of cards and dice.\*

Clairvoyance, clairaudience and telepathy (the Dibba-cakkhu, Dibba-sota and Adesanapatihariya of Buddhism) are now so well attested as objective realities that they have been scientifically grouped together under the heading of Extra-sensory Perception (E.S.P.) and classified with other natural laws that are known to science but are as yet unexplained.

The materialistic scientist of fifty years ago refused to entertain belief in the existence of anything outside his own limited sphere of knowledge. The learned man of to-day is wiser; he knows and admits how little he knows. But he is right in refusing to give up the methods of investigation that have served

science in the past, for it is only by such methods that we can be sure we are not making ourselves subject to delusion. Because of this the only form of religious belief that will ever be acceptable to him is one that lays itself open to investigation in all its details; that not only does not evade the questions of the intellect, but actively encourages them by inviting comparison with the highest knowledge to which we have access. It may yet be that the application of the scientific method to problems of religion will prove the greatest contribution of the west to mankind's spiritual progress.

Such a creed as I have described is Buddhism, the truth preached by the Lord Gautama Buddha twenty-five centuries ago, for it is pre-eminently the science of the mind. With this weapon of purity and knowledge we can cleave the darkness of ignorance that threatens to envelop the world, and can re-establish the law of righteousness. It is to the young people of this Buddhist land of Burma that we appeal for the preservation of religion, for in their hands lies the future. A new instrument and a new power have been placed in their grasp; they are the heirs of a great body of scientific and technical knowledge which is theirs to use for good or ill. But let it be remembered that they are also the inheritors of a great and unchanging wisdom that far transcends any worldly knowledge, and it is only by the right understanding and application of this wisdom of the Dhamma that they can be guided and inspired to turn their other knowledge to good account. The future of mankind rests with Buddhism, for it is the Path of Purity which is also the Path of Peace, the only true and lasting peace for humanity. May its sublime light of understanding and universal benevolence irradiate the world, to bring happiness and liberation to all beings.

As we are dealing with elementary principles we should perhaps begin by defining what we mean by "Buddhism". Many Western writers have raised the query whether Buddhism really is a religion as they understand the term. They are perfectly justified in doing so, because in many ways the doctrine set forth by the Buddha is fundamentally different from the other religions of the world. Its closest affinity is with the more advanced form of Hinduism, known as Vedanta or Advaita, but even here the differences, when one probes beneath the surface, are many and radical.

To most people religion means belief in a body of dogmas which have to be taken on faith, such as belief in a supreme God, a Creator of the universe, certain doctrines concerning an immortal soul and its after-life, a personal saviour and prophets, and a hierarchy of spiritual beings such as angels and archangels who are supposed to carry out the will of the supreme deity.

In Buddhism there is nothing of all this. The Devas, or spiritual beings, are not at all like the gods of other religions: they are beings like ourselves, subject to the same law of cause and effect. They do not control the destiny of mankind;

they are not immortal. The creed taught by the Buddha does not ask us to accept belief in any supernatural agency or anything that cannot be tested by experience. That is why it is unique among religions, and the only form of religious teaching that can survive the critical examination of a scientific mind.

It began as a search for truth; an arduous six year mental and physical discipline voluntarily undertaken by Prince Siddhattha who gave up his royal rank and privileges in order to discover the cause of suffering and a way in which it could be brought to an end for the sake of all living beings. It has retained this essentially characteristic nature; it is still a search for truth, conducted on strictly scientific principles, and one which has to be undertaken by each for himself, according to the rules of right thinking which the Fully Enlightened Buddha has laid down for our guidance.

When I say that the principles on which Buddhism is founded are scientific principles I mean that, unlike the other religions it does not begin with unfounded assumptions concerning any God or First Cause, and it does not claim to present the whole truth of the beginning and end of mankind's spiritual pilgrimage in the form of a "divine revelation". You know that a scientist, when he sets out to study any branch of knowledge and to carry it further than his predecessors, does not begin by setting up a dogma in anticipation of what he expects to find at the end of his researches. The most he does is to form a hypothesis, a theory, and to try to find out by practical experiments whether that theory is correct. If he discovers that the facts do not fit in with his theory, he unhesitatingly discards the theory in favour of a better one. He does not in any circumstances try to twist the facts to make them fit in with his theory, because he knows that if he did so he would never arrive at the truth. Scientific training teaches us that any theory we may hold can only be true if the facts which we are working with – the data of our experience – confirm it in every respect.

This is the fundamental difference between most religious thought and scientific thought. The religious teacher begins with a dogma, which he has to prove at all costs, even going to the length of distorting facts, if he is to present this religion as truth or as anything that can pass as truth. This is the weakness of religion in the present century; experience has proved so many of its theories, its "divinely revealed" dogmas, to be untrue. But the Lord did not do this. He was the only religious teacher who was truly scientific in His approach to the problems of existence and the ultimate truth that underlies them. He did not set up any dogmas, beliefs that have to be taken on trust, but, like any scientist of the present day, He Himself searched and discovered, and having done so He set forth the principles on which He had conducted His research, so that all who wished to do so could follow His method and come to know the final truth themselves.

It was because of this that the Buddha was able to make a statement that cannot be matched in the teachings of any other religious leader. Where all the others have said, “You must have absolute faith in me and in what I tell you,” the Lord Buddha said, “It is natural that doubt should arise in the mind. I tell you not to believe anything merely because it has been handed down by tradition, or because it has been said by some great personage in the past, or because it is commonly believed, or because others have told it to you, or even because I Myself have said it. But whatever you are asked to believe, ask yourself whether it is true in the light of your experience, whether it is in conformity with reason and good principles and whether it is conducive to the highest good and welfare of all beings, and only if it passes this test should you firmly believe it and act in accordance with it.”

There we have in a few words a complete statement of the scientific principle of reasoning, applied to the highest knowledge, given by Lord Buddha two thousand five hundred years ago. It is a definition of rationalism; an assertion of the most tremendous and far-reaching significance, which the world of religious thought as it is commonly understood has never, except in Buddhism, succeeded in putting into practice. The follower of the Buddha is **invited to doubt**, until such time as the basic facts of the doctrine have become self-evident to him and he is able to accept them through the clarifying of his own inner vision. One of the finest of all definitions of the Dhamma is that is it “Ehi passiko” – “That which invites everyone to come and see for himself.”

This, then, is what we mean by Buddhism. It is a system of thought, a methodical approach, based on analysis of all the factors of experience and objective and subjective knowledge. Its purpose is the attainment of that higher insight which enables us to penetrate the veil of ignorance or illusion and free ourselves from each and every fetter that binds us to the cycles of suffering we endure in the ceaseless round of Samsara.

It took the Buddha six years to achieve His aim, but the history of personal Buddhahood goes further back than that; it covers many existences from the time when the first aspiration was made. At present, however, we are only concerned with the facts of the Buddha’s last life, as we find them recorded in the Pali chronicles, because I wish to impress upon you the all-important fact that the Buddha started His search without any guidance from outside. He received no supernatural “revelations”, and never made any claim to be anything but a human personality, self-perfected and self-liberated. He began His great quest for Enlightenment from basic principles and known facts, in the true spirit of scientific enquiry, which proceeds always from the known to the unknown.

What, then, was His starting point in this investigation of the nature of life? It was the recognition of Suffering. By that we mean that the Buddha realised the great truth that all sentient beings are encompassed by various ills, both mental and physical. They are subject to disease, injury, mental unhappiness and finally death, and there is no escape from these conditions so long as there is individual existence of mind and body. It is this insistence on the actuality of Suffering and its universal nature that has caused many Western critics to label Buddhism “pessimistic”. Seen in its true light there is no pessimism in this teaching; it is pure realism. Anyone who seriously considers the nature of life and what Shakespeare calls “the ills that flesh is heir to”, must admit that the great sum of pain by far exceeds the sum total of happiness among living creatures. Many philosophers in the East and West have formed the same conclusion, but where the Lord Buddha found a way of release from this suffering they have offered no solution, and the religions of the world have only been able to give up this life in despair and tell mankind to fix their hopes on a doubtful heaven after death.

This is true pessimism, and it was this despairing outlook, common to all the supernatural religions, which prompted Marx’s well-known dictum, “Religion is the opium of the people”. Religion was offered to the people as an illusory compensation for the hopeless misery of their lives. They were told, in effect, not to hope for anything in this world but to pin their faith in a better world to come, which was promised them in return for their belief and obedience.

The Buddha, on the other hand, declared that His Dhamma produced happiness here and now; he said that in this very life it is possible to achieve a state of bliss greater and more enduring than the bliss of heaven.

When a doctor is called to treat a sick patient his first task is to diagnose the nature of the disease. When he has done that, he discovers its cause, and knowledge of its cause tells him what treatment should be given. The method of the Buddha was precisely the same; the great Physician diagnosed the disease, went on to discover its origin, and thus was able to prescribe treatment. There is an old saying, “Physician, heal thyself” and this is more often applied to those who profess to be healers of the spirit than to those who heal the flesh, because the so-called spiritual healers are notoriously inept when it becomes a matter of dealing with their own sources of mental misery. But here again the Buddha passed the test: He did heal Himself first of all, and it was only when He had successfully carried out His own cure that He attempted to heal others.

Having realised the first of the set of Four Noble Truths, the Truth of Suffering, or Dukkha - that is that birth is suffering: and that death, old age, disease, separation from objects of desire and being in contact with objects of dislike, all these things constitute forms of suffering - He proceeded logically to the cause

of suffering, and found it in Craving. Here again His analysis was rational and strictly scientific, in the sense that the truth of His conclusion can be tested and proved by anyone. The study of psychology has shown us how all our actions are motivated by some form of craving, some desire which we strive to realise, and which brings us unhappiness if we fail to achieve it. This same science, psychology, also tells us that craving is an essential condition of living organisms and that it can never be satisfied by any sensory experience, since as soon as one form of craving is satisfied another takes its place. The whole of life is a succession of states of desire, varying as to intensity and object, but all alike centred about the field of sensory perceptions and endlessly repeating the same cycle of cause and effect.

Another science, that of biological evolution, confirms this teaching that craving is the basis of life. We know that living beings are not created by any God or in any supernatural manner, but that they are the result of natural laws, the process of which can be traced. The entire process of evolution follows a pattern that is seemingly meaningless until we recognise that its motivating factor is Craving. The various species of living beings which have all evolved from a very simple single-cell animal, the amoeba, show how, over countless millions of years, more and more complicated organisms have come into being, each developing from earlier prototypes, and each reaching a higher degree of sensory perception than the ones preceding it. Behind all this complicated process the driving force is craving for increased sensory experience, which can only be obtained through improved faculties of mind and body.

The universe in which we live, and of which we are a part, is a universe governed by consistent natural laws, wherein nothing happens without a cause. Science teaches us not to expect anything to arise in it independently or by accident. So also does Buddhism. The law of evolution based upon craving gives us a clear indication of the unseen law that governs the arising and passing away of individual beings from life to life. That too is dominated by craving; it is the past actions rooted in craving that cause the birth of an individual and the same craving sustains his life from moment to moment throughout its natural duration. When he dies, the impulse of craving is carried on by the law of cause and effect, and with it the potential of his actions and mental tendencies, and these give rise to another birth, in whatever sphere of existence is most suitable for the which is called in Buddhism "Kamma". The physical universe itself, when we examine it minutely and with sufficient knowledge, gives unmistakable proof that it is not only subject to this universal law but that it is in fact the outward and visible manifestation of it. Everywhere, present effects are the product of past causes.

It is a natural law that everything that exists must come to an end; nothing in the universe is stable and nothing is permanent. So the third stage of the



investigation into the nature of life brings us to the realisation that suffering also can be brought to an end. This is the third of the Four Noble Truths, which is called “Dukkha nirodha” – the Cessation of Suffering. But there can be no cessation of suffering so long as there is personal existence; that is to say, so long as there is the continual arising of mental and physical constituents (Nama-rupa - due to volitional activity motivated by craving) the cycle of suffering must continue. Therefore the state in which there is no suffering consciousness must be entirely free from these constituents of personality; it must be beyond all possibility of the arising of birth, disease, old age, decay and death which are inseparably connected with individual personality. That is why Nibbana is called “Cessation”; it is ceasing of all these elements and the utter destruction of that which bind them together. When the Arahant passes away at the end of his final existence the particular chain of causation that has connected his former births is broken because he has of his own intention put an end to craving, while he was still in the flesh.

As for the actual nature of Nibbana, nothing can be said, for the obvious reason that it is a state utterly unlike anything the mind can conceive or that words can describe. Our language deals entirely with the phenomena known to us through our senses, it is bounded and confined by this relative world of subject and object relationships and has no terms of reference for any state wherein these do not exist. That is why Lord Buddha refused to answer questions concerning the nature of Nibbana; no words could give a true picture of it. But this at least we know; it is possible to attain it in this very life and to experience the complete bliss that comes from the absence of passion. Unlike the heavens that other religions ask us to believe are eternal, but which Buddhist philosophy shows cannot be anything but impermanent, the state of Nibbana is not a vague promise that must wait until death for its fulfilment, but an actuality that can be known in this very life. We are not asked to take it on trust – we are invited to seek and find it for ourselves.

Is there, then, no faith demanded in Buddhism? Here again, the answer is different from that given by any other religious system. When a scientist embarks on a new field of exploration the only faith required of him is that he should have confidence in the method of reasoning and experiment followed by his teachers and predecessors. He must follow a tried and tested line of logical progression from known facts to unknown conclusions. It is only in this way that he can be certain of the validity of his discoveries. So it is with the follower of the Buddha; he is asked to have Saddha (faith) in the method given by the Buddha and the Arahants of former days, based upon the clear evidence of their attainment. This is essentially different from having faith in dogmatic assertions. Lord Buddha declared emphatically that each individual must seek out his own liberation: the Buddhas, the Teachers, can only show the way.

This brings us to the last of the Four Noble Truths which are the elementary principles of Buddhism: the Way that leads to Nibbana, the Dukkha-nirodha-gamini-patipada. It is set forth in the Noble Eightfold Path, which is a set of comprehensive plan of living, in three divisions covering the internal and external factors that govern the progress of the individual from the first essential, which is that of holding Right Views, to the last and highest which is the attainment of Right Samadhi or contemplative insight. Much has been written on the subject of this profound and all-embracing pattern of life laid down by the Supreme Buddha: philosophers have praised its deep psychological insight and moralists have extolled its lofty ethical teaching, the highest standard of spiritual life known to mankind. To embark upon anything like a systematic exposition of the Noble Eightfold Path would call for a series of articles at least. Personally, I believe that it is better understood by private study and meditation, under the direction of a teacher, because many of its aspects require an understanding, of things that cannot well be put into words. It carries us into realms of thought that transcend language and the common currency of ordinary human intercourse. As we are dealing with elementary principles, I shall only touch lightly on the first factor, that of Right Views.

How are we to start, how are we to get our thinking straight, in order to be certain that we are working on the right lines? If we go wrong at the beginning, we can be certain that our later conclusions will also be wrong. We shall be like a man trying to find his way in a jungle with a faulty compass. The Buddha started from first principles, as we have seen; He stripped away all erroneous views from His mind and got down to the bedrock facts of existence and made them His first premises.

The Buddha found that all phenomenal or compounded things are impermanent, that all are subjected to suffering and that they are all, without exception, lacking in essential reality – Sabbe Sankhara anicca; sabbe sankhara dukka; sabbe dhamma anatta. To recognise this fact is the first necessity in getting our thought-processes oriented in the right direction to achieve our goal.

All compounded things are impermanent. These are two aspects to this universal truth. The first is that obvious aspect which we all know – the fact that everything, including the elements of our own personality, come into being and pass away again in accordance with the law of cause and effect. They depend upon previous conditions to bring them into existence. Where the question of living beings is concerned we find the process analysed in the formula of Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppada); it has its counterpart in the laws that control the arising and passing away of all phenomena both material and immaterial. Nothing in the universe is stable; nothing is everlasting. The other aspect of this law of impermanence is the hidden side, which can only be discovered by insight. Every law of the universe has two

sides: the aspect which is apparent to everybody through common experience and the aspect which is analogous to it but which can only be discerned by those of superior intellect. In this case, the obvious side of the law of decay and impermanence is like the eighth part of an iceberg that appears above the surface; the greater and more important part of it is hidden from view under the water.

Nevertheless, we of the twentieth century have a certain advantage over our predecessors in this matter. We do not have to depend entirely upon the development of our insight to enable us to understand something of the hidden side of the law of impermanence because science is able to help us. The law of impermanence is a fundamental principle of science. Physics, the study of nature of matter and material causes, tells us that all material objects are composed of atoms or electronic particles. They consist of neutrons and positions in various combinations, all in a state of continual change. What appears to our superficial sight to be solid matter is in reality made up of these electronic particles in a condition of perpetual flux, arising and passing away with incredible rapidity, and in ceaseless movement. This exactly coincides with the philosophical teaching of Buddhism concerning the structure of the material universe, and the physical and mental components of our own personality conform to the same law. When we come to analyse the factors of a living being they resolve themselves into nothing more than the Five Khandha process; that is, Rupa-kkhandha, Vedana-kkhandha, Sanna-kkhandha, Sankhara-kkhandha and Vinnana-kkhandha. Rupa stands for the material qualities, Vedana for the different sensations, Sanna for the perceptions, Sankhara for the mental tendencies arising from past Kamma while Vinnana signifies the various types of consciousness that arise in response to past and present conditions. This collection of “aggregates” embraces the whole of what we are able to discover in the analysis of personality, and all are subject to change from moment to moment.

Just as the modern physicist has discarded the old static conception of matter and views material phenomena as a causally-linked series of events in time and space rather than as solid and perduring objects, so we must learn to regard human personality (puggal). From the moment of birth until death it is nothing more than a serial continuity of cause and effect, and it is this same serial continuity of Kamma that carries over to the next birth. There is no immortal soul or other entity to be found in the collection of aggregates that make up a living being: hence it is said to be “Anatta” – without any trace of an enduring identity or “Self”. This is the first fact to be recognised by one who is in search of Right Views or correct understanding, and it is strictly in agreement with the science of physics and the latest psychological research. Buddhism is the only religion that does not demand belief in either a creator-god or an immortal soul. This fact may not seem to have any great significance to Buddhists, who are

accustomed to the principles of their religion, but actually it is of the utmost importance to-day, because religion is being attacked by scientific materialism principally on the ground that there is no rational justification for the belief in Soul, yet it is on the strength of these and similar theories that most religions stand or fall. Because Buddhism is independent of such dogmas and teaches instead the universal law of cause and effect on scientific line, it is the only form of religious belief that can meet the arguments of the sceptical materialist. It is not too much to say, as I myself believe, that the whole future of religious thought in the world rests with Buddhism.

The essence of Right Views is to understand when we speak of “self” we are speaking only in conventional sense. In the ultimate sense there is nothing that can be called the “self”; there is only the process of arising and passing away of causally-conditioned elements, mental and physical. There is, as the Visuddhi Magga expresses it, “no performer of actions”; it is only the actions that carry on the illusion of personal identity from one thought-moment to another.

“Kammussa-” “There is no doer of deeds; (only) empty phenomena roll on”.

It is apparent, therefore, that the three signs of Being, Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta, are in reality three aspects of the same truth. That which is impermanent must of necessity be subject to suffering; its suffering is inherent in its arising and passing away. When we investigate more deeply still we come to recognise that all sensation (Vedana) is only suffering in varying degrees. It is also clear that everything that is impermanent, that is momentarily undergoing change and that does not preserve any real identity from one moment to another, must be Anatta. It cannot be said to have any self-identity or any enduring characteristic by which it may be known and distinguished. It is “suddhadhamma” – merely a succession of empty phenomena coming into existence and passing away in obedience to the causal law.

Precisely why is it essential to recognise the truth of Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta? It is because, as we have seen, to destroy the cause of suffering we have to free ourselves from craving. Craving is rooted in false beliefs concerning the self and the desirability of enjoying material benefits and sensory pleasures. Right understanding consists in seeing clearly that these things can never bring permanent satisfaction because both they and the consciousness that experiences them are alike impermanent. This is the Buddhist answer to the materialistic philosophers who imagine that enduring happiness can be attained through the pursuit of material ends. The true, lasting happiness that nothing can disturb does not come from external things; it cannot be found anywhere in the unstable, ever-changing conditions of life. It comes from within, from the weakening of attachment and craving which constitutes freedom and liberation of the mind.

This is not to say that we should cease from trying to improve worldly conditions. Far from it, Lord Buddha did not preach a doctrine of inactivity and negation. Everything we consciously strive to do for the welfare, both material and spiritual, of our fellow men, comes under the heading of Right Actions, and these right actions are an important part of our self-discipline. They bear good fruit both in this world and in the higher states, because they are performed in a spirit of unselfishness and benevolence. But we must bear constantly in mind that the type of happiness we give and receive by such means is only a relative happiness; it can, at the best, only amount to an alleviation of some of the suffering and distress of the world of living beings. We must never be deluded into thinking that we can make a heaven on earth for mankind in general by material means. The truth of this is amply demonstrated by modern material progress. Science has given us great powers; we have control over the laws of nature to a far greater extent than humanity has ever had before, yet still we cannot entirely eliminate fear, pain, distress and danger from human life. "Decay is inherent in all compounded things, O Bhikkhus. Therefore I exhort you: strive diligently." Such were the final words of the Exalted Lord Buddha, the supreme Teacher. We must see clearly where our true happiness is to be found, and never waver from the path that leads to it.

Finally, I would like to quote the words of Prof. Satkari Mookherjee in his learned treatise on the Buddhist philosophy of universal flux: "Lord Buddha was an intellectual giant and a rationalist above everything else. He exhorted His disciples to accept nothing on trust. 'Just as people test the purity of gold by burning it in fire, by cutting it and examining it on a touch stone, so exactly you should, O ye monks! accept My words after subjecting them to a critical test and not out of reverence for me.' These words of the Buddha furnish the key to the true spirit of Buddhist philosophy throughout its career. And this freedom of thought encouraged by the Buddha was responsible for the schism in the Buddhist Church and for division of Buddhist philosophy into so many divergent schools. This should not be regarded as a matter of regret; on the contrary; we should read in it the signs of pulsating life".

Too often in the past, dogmatic and theistic religion has thrived on the oppression of free thought. Buddhism has never done so; it has thrived solely on the intrinsic truth of its fundamental doctrines, which after all are the same throughout all the schools of Buddhist philosophy. Now, the scientific reaction against religion has turned the wheel full circle, and the followers of materialism are trying to suppress freedom of religious thought. This is the great danger in which the world stands at the present moment. The Buddhist doctrine of Kamma required that each man shall be at liberty to work out his own destiny; he is not, as some modern ideologies proclaim, the blind instrument of economic or political forces, he is a free agent, and his freedom

must be protected, for in that way alone is true progress possible, both individually and collectively.

It has not been possible for me to do more than touch the fringe of some of the more important aspects of the elements of Buddhist philosophy. The subject is vast and comprehensive as the universe itself, and it is not confined to any one place or time, neither is it dependent upon externals of fashion in thought or outlook. A famous architect who was buried in a great cathedral of his own design had for epitaph: "If you would behold his monument, look around you." Similarly it may be said of Lord Buddha "If you wish for confirmation of the truth of His Teaching, look at the universe around you, and find its answer in the universe within". For it was He who said, "O Bhikkhus, within this fathom-long body, equipped with mind and mental faculties, I declare unto you is the world, the origin of the world and the cessation thereof."

"Sabba papassa akaranam,

Kusalassa upasampada

Sacitta pariyo-dapanam-

Etam Buddhadasanam".

"To put an end to evil, to fulfil all that is good, to purify the mind - this is the Teaching of the Buddhas."