



THE BUDDHIST WAY

Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

THE BUDDHIST WAY

THE AIM AND WAY OF LIFE

PROBLEMS & RESPONSIBILITIES

HOW TO PRACTISE BUDDHISM

PRACTICAL BUDDHISM

RELIGION IN A SCIENTIFIC AGE

STATUS OF WOMEN IN BUDDHISM

THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

BUDDHISTS NEED NOT CHANGE THEIR RELIGION

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Introduction

Happy events such as birth and marriage, and sad occasions like sickness and death in a person's existence very often necessitate the observance of certain rites, which have been performed in every society from time immemorial. Such rites, which originated even long before the various major world religions became established, have been handed down by our forefathers, and in the passage of time, have gradually assumed the form of traditional customary practices until the present day. We continue to practise many of these rites through ignorance and fear, not daring to change or discard them even with the acquisition of a modern education and sophisticated life-style.

In particular many of the rites performed on sad occasions like death and funerals are shrouded in mystery and superstition, and very often incur a tremendous financial burden on bereaved families. This is one of the major reasons why many Buddhists are easily converted to other religions because it offers

good ammunition for other religionists to hurl their criticisms and attacks on the Buddhists. It is imperative that the Buddhist community in this country should awaken to this situation and make courageous efforts to make reforms in the performance of their rites and rituals in consonance with correct Buddhist religious principles.

This book presents in a simple and understandable manner the various rites which could be performed by Buddhists on happy and sad occasions in their lives. It is hoped that they will make efforts to understand them and practise them when the occasion arises. By so doing, they will not only attain satisfaction and a sense of security in the knowledge that they are performing proper Buddhist rites, but also help to enhance the image of their own religion in the eyes of others.

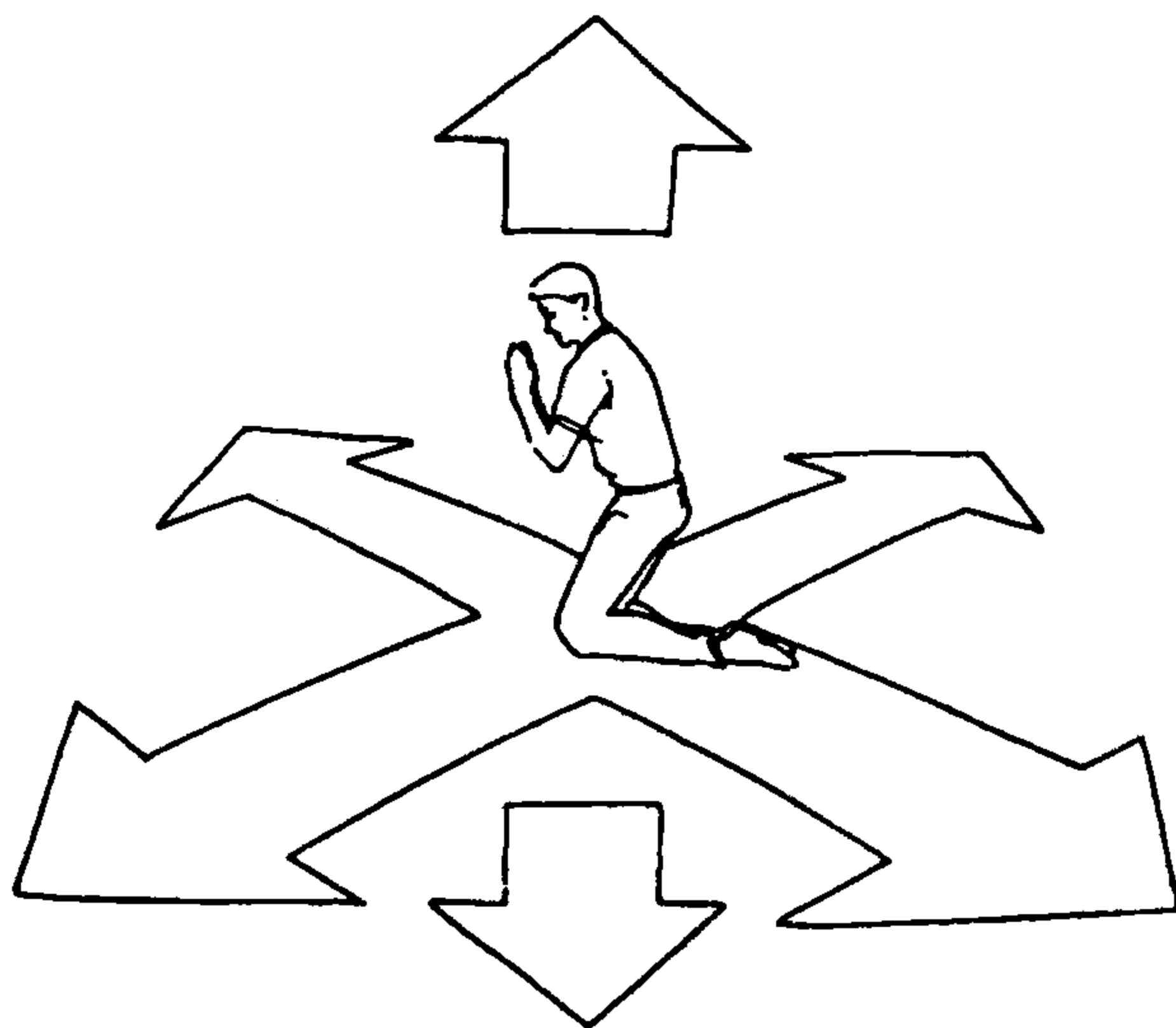
Tan Teik Beng
President,
Buddhist Missionary Society,
Malaysia.
1st, January 1989

The Buddhist Way

Duties of Parents in the Upbringing of their Children

The birth of a child is a happy event. Having a baby and bringing him up is an adventure that can be embarked upon happily and with confidence. At the same time it means the beginning of a long period of sacrifice and responsibility for the parents. Even though human beings are far advanced on the evolutionary ladder, their young normally take a long time to mature and become independent. Parents have the onerous duty of bearing the responsibility of caring for their children and nurturing them to become useful adults of the future. However over the centuries, societies have developed certain well-tested formulae to guide parents in this task of child rearing. In this connection religion plays a central role in providing parents with a framework within which to train the young in ethics, behaviour and morality. In Buddhism, the Buddha has given very useful advice on the duties of parents towards their children and vice versa. The **SIGALOVADA SUTRA** is perhaps the best known of these valuable injunctions. The Buddha related an incident of how he had once noticed a young man performing a simple ritual of bowing to the six directions (*north, south, east, west, zenith and nadir*). Upon being questioned as to the meaning and intent of his action, the young man replied that he did not know

the significance of his performance but that he was merely following his late father's advice. Characteristically, the Buddha did not condemn the young man for performing such a ritual, but gave it a useful meaning by a practical interpretation. He said that the



Religion will help children along the correct path

act of paying respects to the six directions signifies honouring and fulfilling one's duties and obligations to one's parents, teachers, religious personalities, one's wife, children and employees. Thus, we see that the Buddha laid great emphasis on a person's relationship with others, but more especially so between parents and children. Parents must care for their children, by allowing them their independence when the time is right and by giving them their rightful inheritance in due course. On the other hand, children on their part

are duty-bound to care for their parents by extending to them filial devotion. This is done out of mutual respect and gratitude towards them and not out of expectation of any reward in return. It is indicated here that there is a close link between religion and parent-children relationship. Parents should not fail to underscore the religious significance of the birth of a child. A family that develops its relationship along sensible established religious lines cannot go wrong.

Parents are duty-bound to develop such a relationship based on their religious cultural heritage. Whilst other religionists have their formal and obligatory baptisms and christenings to perform, Buddhist parents need only bring their children to the temple so as to re-affirm their faith in the Triple Gem and to seek refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Having sought refuge in the Triple Gem parents themselves may be endowed with the confidence in the up-bringing of their children with the firm assurance that they are being protected from all evil. We cannot deny the existence of evil forces around us which are malevolent towards human beings and which could cause harm. Bringing a child to the temple, and having sacred traditional religious services performed in its favour would definitely contribute to the well-being of the child. This could also be considered as the initial step in associating the child with the temple which if continued from a very tender age, could become part and parcel of its life. This habit if maintained up to adult life would serve the person in good stead when confronted with problems.

Blessing Services for Children

The reciting of Sutras imparts very beneficial effects on a child. It was reported that during the Buddha's time, when a child who was in a critical condition due to external evil influence was brought

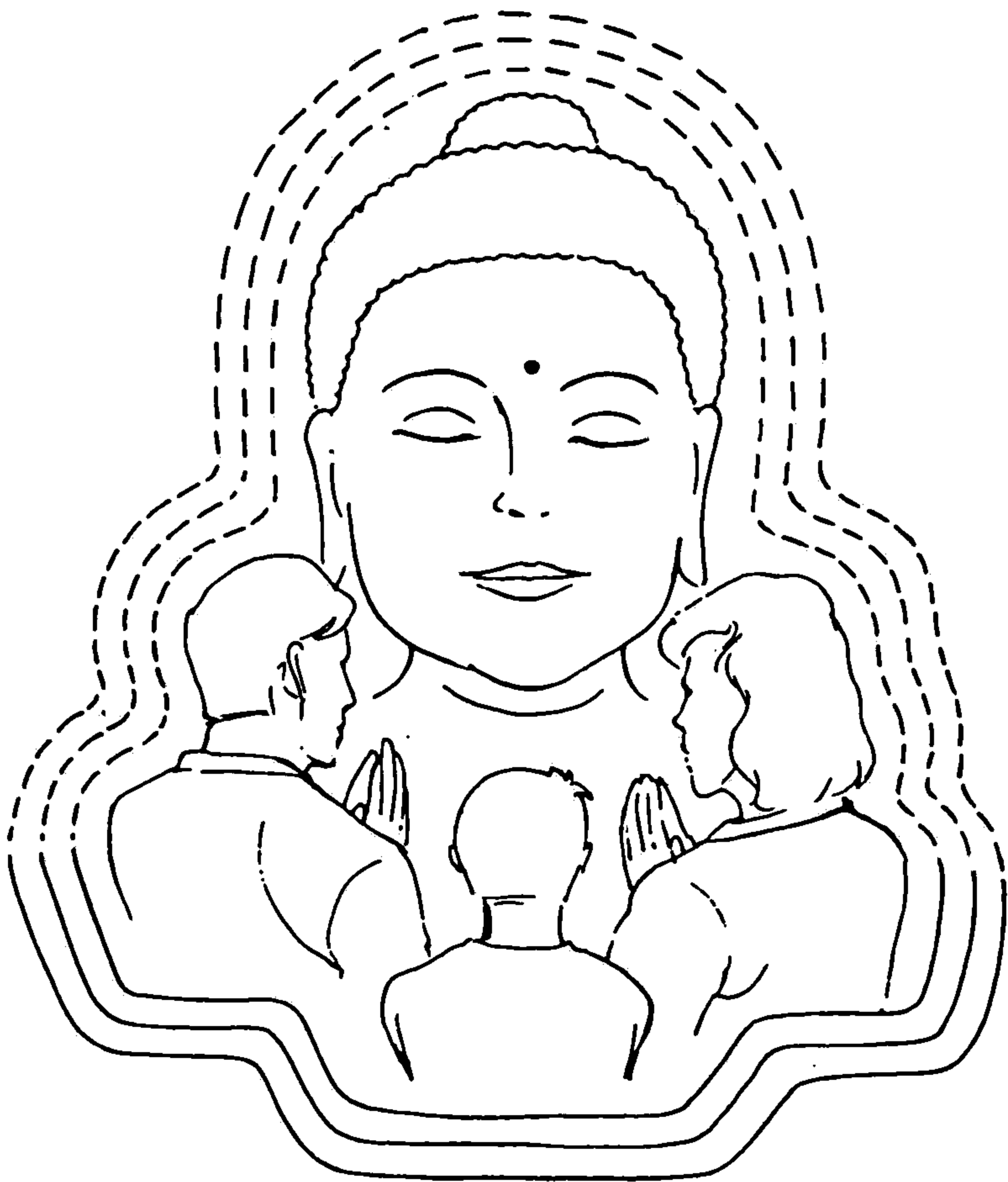


The Buddha saves the life of a child.

before him, the Buddha instructed that the Sutras be recited by an assembly of monks. The resultant effect was that the child averted death and lived to a ripe old age. In fact he was called **AYUWADDHANA** meaning “**long life**” because he was no longer in danger of a premature death.

Why do we go to the Buddha for Refuge?

When those who believe in a god experience fear, sorrow or any disturbance they pray for help and protection. Many Buddhists ask whom they can turn to when they are confronted with insecurity. In such circumstances Buddhists can recall the Buddha to their mind and seek solace. There is no doubt that the Buddhist concept of god is different from that in other religions but when they contemplate the supreme qualities of the Buddha, his great victories, and his calm and noble characteristics, their minds will be calmed and they will gain confidence. Even many other religionists say god is not a person, but a force which is personalized in the mind. When their minds are calmed and strengthened by focusing on this power, they are in a position to face disturbances to evaluate the problems and find the means to overcome them. Buddhists can overcome their problems in a similar manner by recalling the image of the Buddha. Naturally many of our problems are caused by the mind and mind alone is able to solve them through understanding and confidence. That is why the know-



Buddhist families should live in the light of the Buddha

ledge of the Dharma is important. When the mind is strengthened through inspiration and devotion towards the Buddha it can overcome the sense of helplessness and fear of evil spirits, of being left alone, and confidence is regained. This is what is meant by going for refuge to the Buddha.

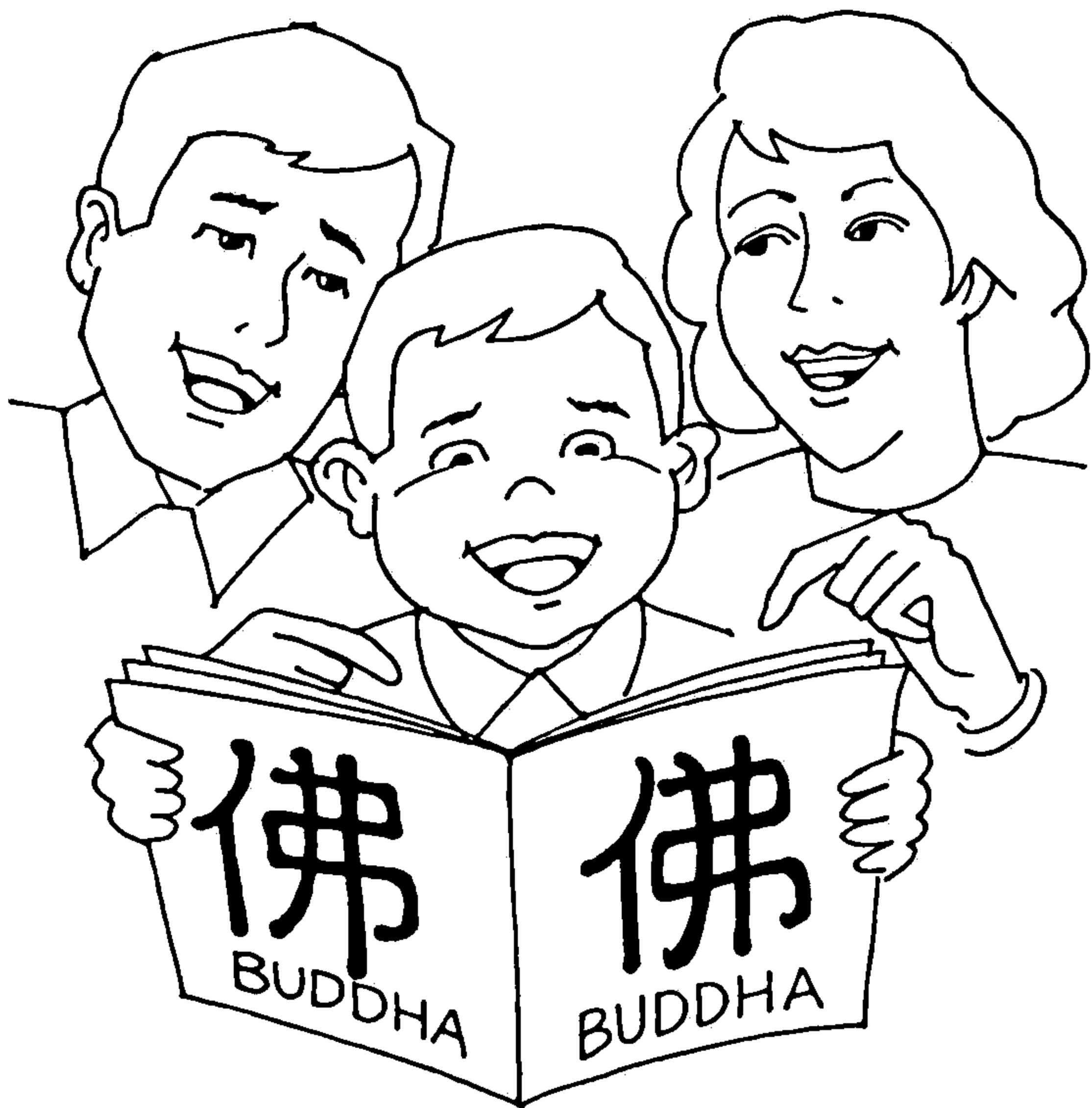
Whilst seeking refuge for the child at the temple, offerings of flowers, incense, candles or fruits may be made at the shrine room and the resident monks invited to recite sutras for the blessing of the infant. If so desired, the advice of the monks may also be sought for a suitable Buddhist name to be given to the child.

As the child grows up, it is the responsibility of parents to bring the child regularly to the temple to enable it to associate with religious-minded people and to listen to simple religious discourses and sermons and derive benefit therefrom. In course of time the child will get used to performing Buddhist practices and will feel comfortable amidst the serene atmosphere in the temple surroundings. Of course children should also be brought to the temple for special blessing services on important occasions like their first day at school, examinations, birthdays and other happy events. When children get used to listening to the sutras, they acquire immense confidence in themselves because they know that through the beneficial influence of the sutras, they are being protected. They therefore tend to perform better in whatever undertaking they set out to do, and as a result are less nervous, feel more secure and will no longer have the dread of being left utterly helpless.



Buddhist Education and Cultural Practices

An effective way to introduce religious lessons for the young on morality and ethics is by using pictures, illustrations, religious symbols and by giving interesting talks on Buddhist legends and stories. This method may appeal to many people, especially the young and it can help them to appreciate Buddhism much better. Certain stage performances or sketches



Parents should teach their children to become good buddhists

depicting historical Buddhist legendary events can also help to create a good and lasting impression on the young minds.

To lead children on the right path, parents themselves should first set the example and lead ideal lives. It is impossible to expect worthy children from unworthy parents. Apart from Kammic tendencies, children are influenced by the defects and virtues of parents too. Responsible parents should take precaution not to transmit negative traits to their children.

The Buddha's advice regarding traditions and customs was neither to accept nor to reject anything without first considering whether such practices are meaningful and useful. Less emphasis is placed on these methods once a person has learned the Dhamma to lead a meaningful Buddhist life. The Buddha says that whatever methods we use to train the mind, our attitude should be like a man who used a raft to get across a river. After having crossed the river, he did not cling on to the raft, but left it on the river bank to continue his journey. Similarly, cultural practices should be regarded merely as an aid to gain inspiration and not as an end in themselves.

Buddhist cultural practices vary from country to country. When performing these traditional practices, we must be careful not to categorise Buddhism as belonging to any one of them. For example, we should not think in terms of Chinese Buddhism, Sinhalese Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism. This only

creates disharmony, discrimination and misunderstanding. We should also be aware of certain so-called Buddhist leaders who try to reinforce their own Buddhist labels by incorporating many forms of charms, divine powers, mystical and supernatural practices and concepts to hoodwink the masses. Such unscrupulous actions are done with a total disregard to what the Buddha has said about such practices.

Another common practice among Buddhists is to hold blessing services in their new homes. Whenever people move into new dwelling houses, or when shifting house from one locality to another, it is the general custom among Buddhists to invite monks to perform blessing services so as to ensure that the place will be well protected spiritually as well as be a peaceful abode for all who dwell in it where happiness, peace and harmony will pervade. Similarly, such blessing services could also be performed when occupying new business premises, or whenever a new business is launched.

Marriage

According to the Buddha, as a child grows into adulthood, it is also the duty of parents to find a suitable spouse for their offspring. Of course this is not the custom nowadays in modern society, but nevertheless parents can be supportive when their children begin to look for suitable mates for themselves. This would be the best opportunity to help them not only materially but also in the form of offering discreet advice and guidance in the choice of suitable



Marriages should be conducted in a religious atmosphere

partners, so as to avoid pitfalls in life. If the children had been coming to the temple regularly, the chances are that they would have had the opportunity to associate with other Buddhist youths who share with them the same religious values and interests and who would invariably make good marriage partners.

It has been noticed that many Buddhists in this country tend to forget their spiritual obligations when it comes to the most important and auspicious occasion of their lives – their marriage. It is customary in Buddhist countries for engaged couples to invite

monks to their homes for a blessing service. This could be performed either before or after the wedding which normally takes place at the Registry of Marriages or at the homes of the parties concerned. It is hoped that all Buddhist couples would fulfil their obligations in this manner when they get married. Simple offerings of flowers, incense and candles are all that are required for the short blessing service to which the parents of both parties together with their relatives and friends could be invited to participate. Such blessing service, given on the auspicious day, would be a definite spiritual contribution to the success, peace, harmony and happiness of the newlyweds.

Infatuation alone is not a sufficient basis for a successful marriage; hence young people should well be advised to be sure of the spiritual side of their affair before taking the final vows. When a couple embarks on marriage by observing religious tenets, they are bound to have greater respect for the institution of marriage and they will naturally turn to religion in times of stress for solace. After having been happily married the young couple should themselves strive to become good and responsible Buddhist parents to their own children of the future.

Religious Rites

Although religious rites, rituals and ceremonies are not favoured by intellectuals, such practices are nevertheless important for developing and maintaining the devotional aspects of a religion and for creating a sense of inspiration among the masses. For



Religious symbols aid devotion

many people, cultivating devotion is the first important step towards the experience of a religion. If there is no devotional and cultural aspects attached to Buddhism, people may be drawn to some other kind of beliefs or practices, even though they are aware that such practices are steeped in superstition or blind faith.

It is important for religions to have some harmless rituals and reasonable practices for people to express their devotion and spiritual feelings. Many of the Buddhist ceremonies help to cultivate good habits and positive emotions amongst the followers who consequently become more tolerant, considerate and cultured people. When performed with understanding

and earnestness, these traditional practices tend to strengthen one's beliefs as against a mere intellectual approach. Buddhism without any devotion would be rather cold, detached and academic.

Taboos

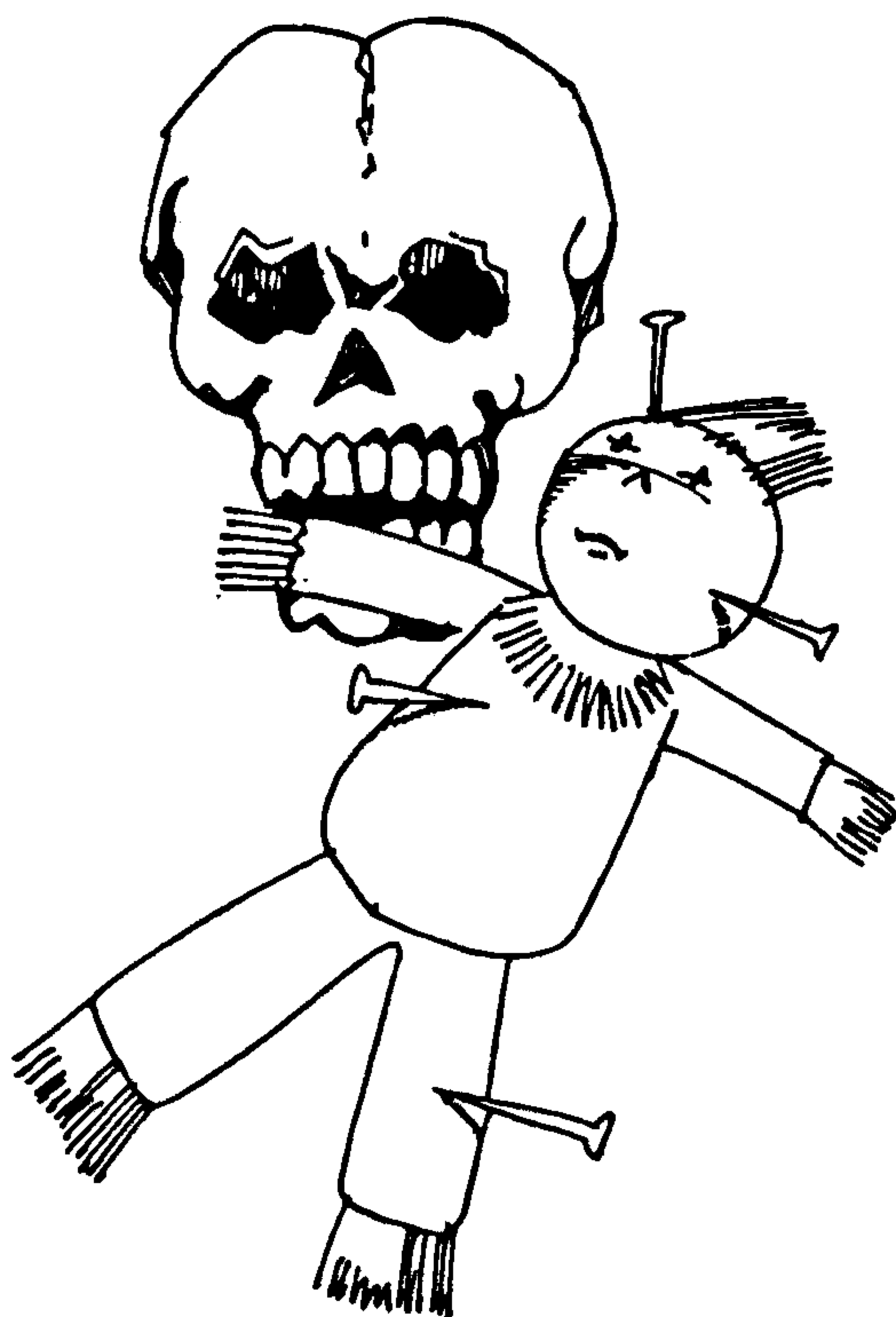
Most races have their own taboos. In Malaysia perhaps we have more than our fair share of them because the three major ethnic groups have their own animistic beliefs and each is influenced by the others. Because of ignorance, fear and superstition each group tends to accept the beliefs of others rather than studying them rationally and discarding them as being irrelevant to modern society. For example many Asian communities believe that they must not clip their finger nails after dark nor wash their hair on certain days of the week. Some people think that it is bad luck to see shaven headed religious men the first thing in the morning whilst others will not sweep their houses after dark. It is even believed to be bad to carry meat around at night for fear that it might attract evil spirits. Some parents advise their children to carry a piece of metal to protect themselves from ghosts. Then there are those who believe that howling dogs and hooting owls at night could bring bad luck and that a twitching of the left eye is a bad omen. Some people consider these as very serious issues. But those who ignore them are free from fear and disturbances.

What is the Buddhist attitude towards such beliefs? Where does rational thinking end and superstition begin? They all seem to originate in our fear of the

unknown. Sometimes there are practical reasons for observing certain beliefs. For example it is of course inadvisable to cut one's fingernails in the dark simply because one could cut one's finger in the process. As far as evil spirits are concerned the Buddha has said that so long as we practise loving-kindness towards all beings, visible and invisible, so long as we do others no harm by living sensibly and believing in the power of the Dhamma or the Truth as expounded by the Buddha, and so long as we develop our right understanding by studying his Teachings, nothing can harm us. This again means we have to develop our religious devotion and confidence by visiting the temple regularly, and by having useful discussions with religious teachers so as to enrich our understanding of the Dhamma. The temple must be a place where people can gain more knowledge and understanding to get rid of superstitious beliefs and to eradicate undue fear in the minds of innocent people.

Charms and Black Magic

It is common practice among many Asian communities to think that they are the victims of black magic and charms whenever they face some unhappy experiences in their lives. At the slightest indication that something unpleasant has happened they would often run off to consult seers, astrologers, mediums and '**bomohs**'. Of course the livelihood of these vendors of magic and charms depends on telling their customers that something is wrong or that some evil forces have been employed by someone to bring about



*Charms and black magic have no effect on
the spiritually strong individual*

their family misfortune. They then claim to be able to counteract these evil forces and charge large sums of money by promising to 'cure' them. More often than not the only effect is that these unsuspecting victims end up becoming lighter in their pocket and as a result are none the wiser for their experience. Popular Buddhism has not been spared by the antics of these quacks and charlatans, some of whom even going to the extent of masquerading themselves as monks to make a fast dollar from their unsuspecting victims. But

the Buddha has declared in no uncertain terms that many of our misfortunes are essentially created by the untrained impure minds and it is only through our own efforts and understanding that we will be able to overcome them.

In this country particularly there are a great many such beliefs. This may be because the three major races have their own peculiar beliefs, and a great deal of interchange had taken place so much so that there had developed a tremendously varied set of beliefs which are uniquely Malaysian.

The Buddhist cure for misfortune of any kind is as scientific as the methods of modern psychiatry. It is summarized in the Second Noble Truth—The Cause of Suffering. Before we can look for a cure to misfortune (ill luck, bad health, loss of someone or **something personal and family problems**) we must get to the root of it. We must examine rationally what actually is happening and understand that only we alone can overcome the misfortune. Concentration certainly will strengthen the mind to understand the cause of the problems in order to find a solution. In the case of sickness, a calm mind helps to effect a cure faster. By merely appealing to the Supernatural to overcome misfortune is not the proper solution to end suffering. We must reflect calmly that misfortune is the lot of anyone who is born into this world and that what happens to us must be looked at rationally so that a reasonable solution could be found. This is not fatalistic — it shows that each individual, using the Right Effort can rid himself of misfortune.

Images, Holy Water, Holy Thread, Talismans and Amulets

Society in general is better educated now than it has ever been in the past, but in spite of vast advances achieved in the field of scientific knowledge, many people still suffer from fear, suspicion and insecurity. The root cause of these states of mind stems



Sacred objects remind us of the power of truth

from ignorance, uncertainty and craving. Because of our ignorance of the non-existence of a permanent self, we believe in our ego and this belief gives rise to craving. We are filled with insatiable desires and fear of losing that which we possess. We fear that we will be harmed or that we will face 'bad luck'. So what do we do? We turn instinctively to our animistic past and depend on special talismans and amulets to protect us. The Buddha has clearly stated that external objects are not strong enough to protect those whose minds are weak and confused. Our only security is to take refuge in our knowledge of the truth and in our realization of the true nature of the self and other phenomena. Once we understand that there is no reality in a self that can be harmed, we become secure and confident. No harm can come to him who is unafraid, unselfish or undeluded.

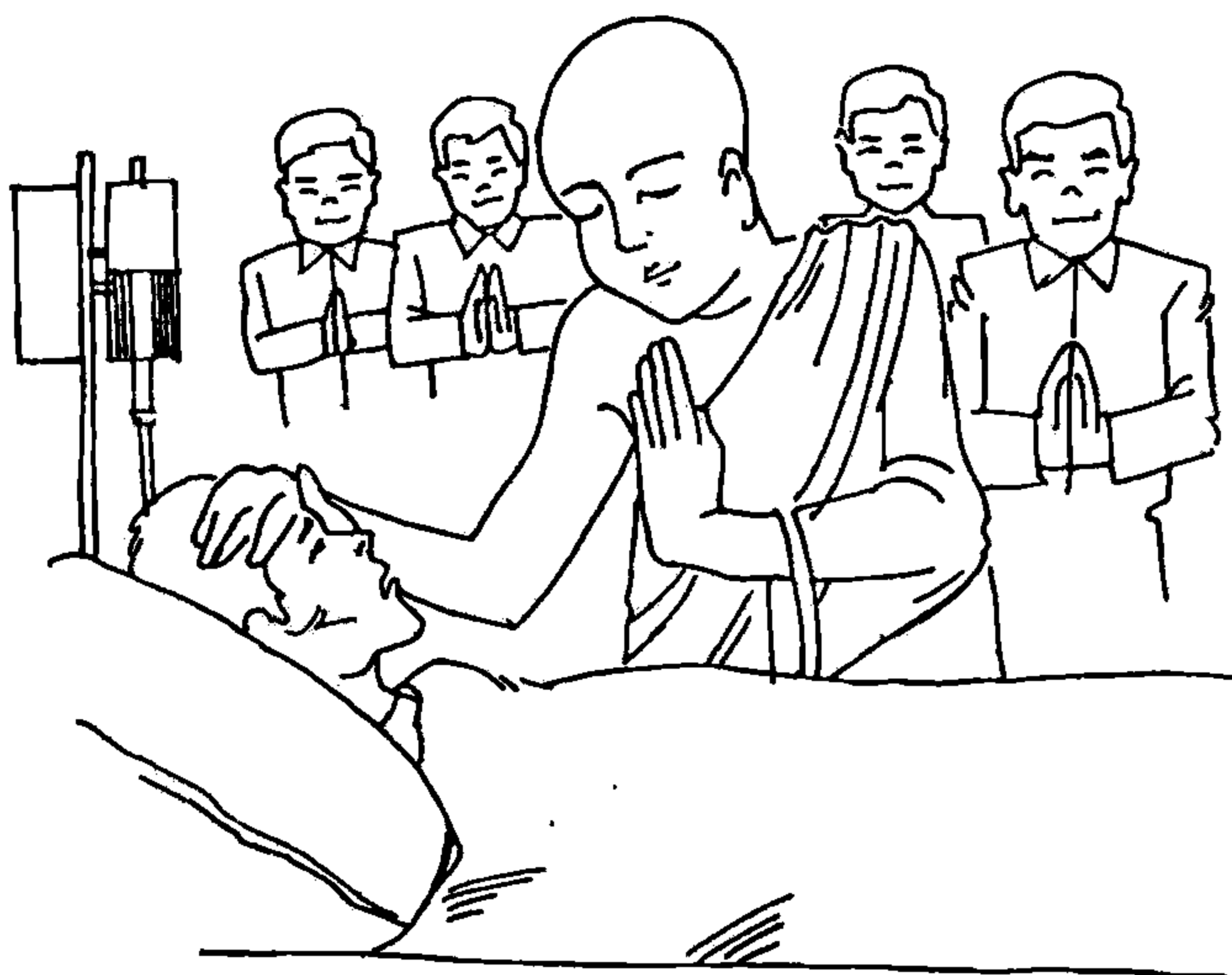
However, it does not mean that Buddhism condemns the use of certain religious objects like a pendant of the Buddha image to give us a sense of security. Many great men had found solace and comfort by contemplating on the serene and calm image of the Buddha. The first Prime Minister of India, Mr. Nehru said that when he was imprisoned by the British his only source of comfort was a tiny Buddha image which he had with him. Of course the image itself had no magical power. But what it symbolized was the great qualities of the Buddha who had himself remained calm and unaffected by the attacks made against him by his enemies and it was this symbol that reminded Nehru of his own strength with which he

could face adversity calmly. We too can carry images of the Buddha or inscriptions of the sutras around with us to give us confidence. Many sutras end with the invocation:- **“By the power of this truth, may victory be mine”** or **“may happiness be mine”**. This shows that as Buddhists we do not believe in the animistic power of images or talismans, but that they are to be regarded as mere aids which could help us to gain confidence in ourselves.

In the same way some Buddhists also go to temples, to collect bottles of holy water and pieces of string over which the sutras have been recited with great concentration. These also give psychological strength and confidence to the user because they remind him of the truth which was uttered in the sutras and which recall the words of the Buddha.

Sickness

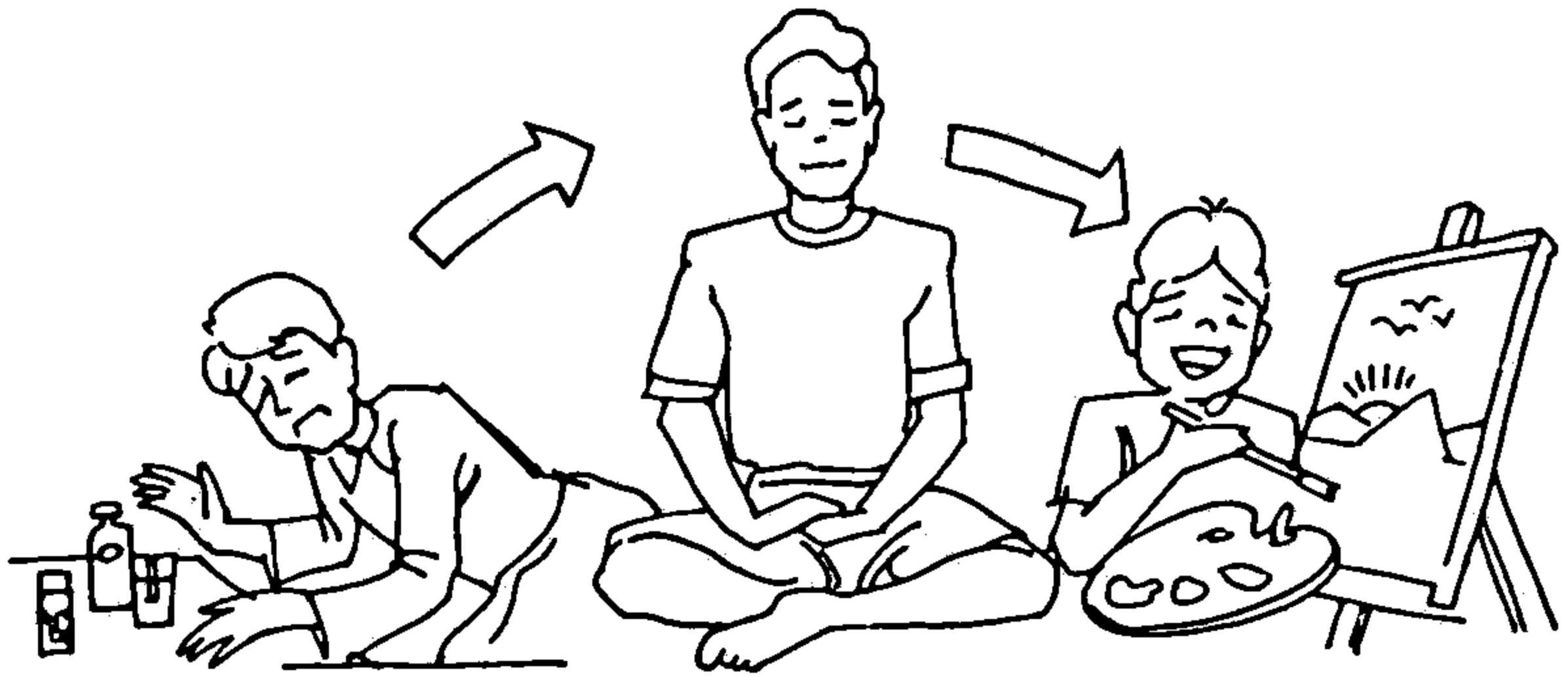
Recently there have been many criticisms levelled against Buddhist leaders that they do not seem to care for those who are sick. Critics point out that followers of certain other religions do go from hospital to hospital comforting sick patients. Such concern for the sick is something which is indeed commendable. In Buddhist countries devotees invite monks to visit the sick and the monks are more than willing to render assistance in this respect. In fact learned monks who are very well versed in traditional medicine, are often consulted and they even render their voluntary services.



Reciting the holy scriptures can help in healing

Since many Buddhists are not well versed in their own religion to counteract the tactics of other religionists, such apathy only enable the followers of other religions to take advantage of the situation to convert them. Such other religionists have even gone to the extent of promising salvation by frightening their victims with the threat of hell and in this way have won converts! Buddhist monks want to have no part in this. However they will willingly accompany family members and close friends when invited to visit the sick, not only in hospital but at home as well.

Sickness is part and parcel of our daily existence in this world, and we should take it in its stride. Never-



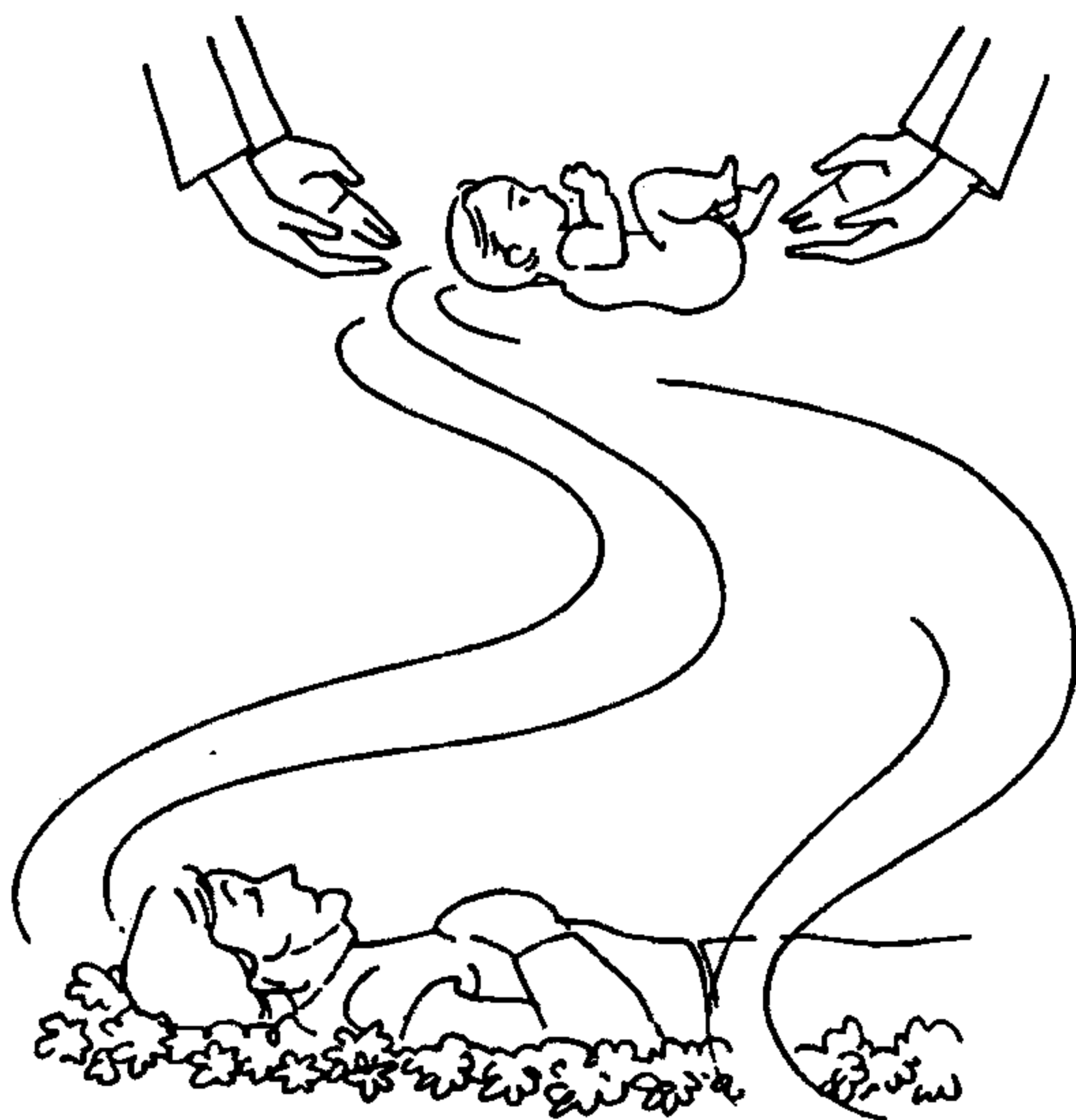
Meditation can create inner happiness

theless, in the event of sickness befalling a person, it would be advisable, apart from resorting to modern medical treatment, to invite monks to perform religious blessing services for the speedy recovery of the patient. Such blessings when received with a proper frame of mind will exert a considerable spiritual and psychological influence on the patient, thus accelerating his recovery. In particular, when the illness happens to be associated with the attitude of the patient's mind, a blessing service by a monk would be most helpful. In instances where the belief is that an illness has been caused by some bad external influence or evil spirits, a religious blessing service would create a good psychological attitude which in turn could radiate beneficial vibrations within the body to promote speedy recovery. However, as understanding Buddhists, we should not surrender ourselves to the erroneous belief that evil spirits are the sole cause of our sickness. The Buddha's advice – **"Whenever you are physically sick, don't allow your mind also to be sick"** is indeed

very true. In accordance with this advice, we must be guided by our intelligence and common sense to seek proper medical attention for our illness rather than to succumb ourselves to ill-founded superstition.

Death

Man is mortal and death is to be expected. However, very few people can accept the separation or the fear of what happens after death.



Every being that is born dies and reborn

There is so much ignorance among Buddhists regarding death that people even change their religion so that they can get a “proper” funeral to ensure a

short-cut to heaven. Families have been known to be separated because children who belong to one religion hastily convert their sick parents on their death bed. Some Buddhist children are powerless because they have not learned what to do as true Buddhists. It is therefore very important for Buddhist parents to make their wishes known clearly and to teach their children what to do as Buddhists in the event of their death. Many ignorant people have taboos against death and do not like to attend funerals during certain periods thinking that it will bring bad luck to themselves.

Children must learn from young that death is a natural part of existence. They must learn not to be unnaturally afraid at the sight of coffins and corpses. They must know what is the sensible thing to do at a funeral. If this is not done and when a death occurs, young adults will be at a loss and be at the mercy of unscrupulous religious people who either use this opportunity to convert them to their faith, or make them spend large sums of money on superstitious and other meaningless practices.

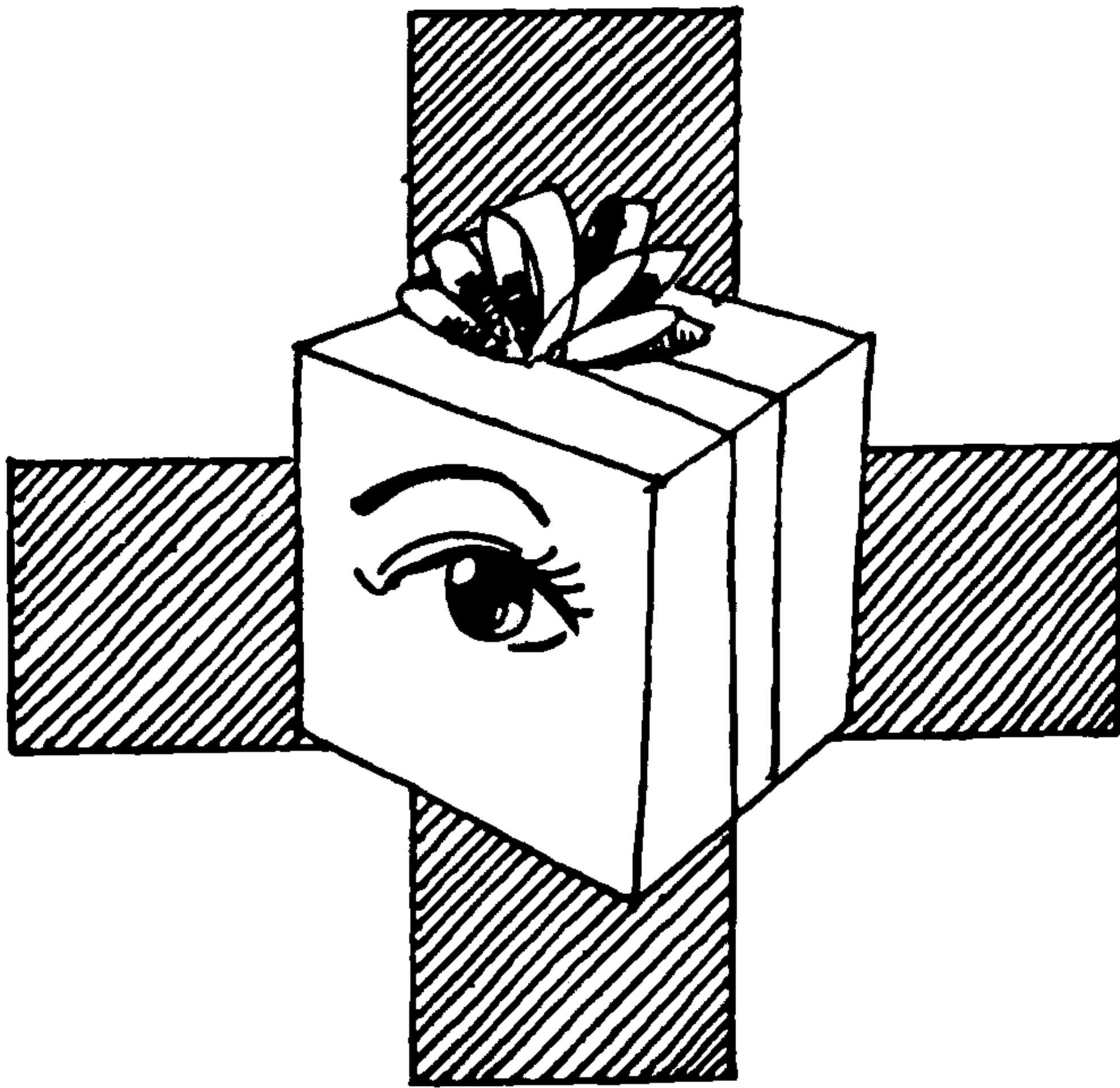
First of all we must understand the Buddhist attitude towards death. Scientifically speaking "Life" is an incessant series of rising and falling. The cells in our body are constantly dying and are replaced by new ones. As such, birth and death are taking place every moment. The phenomenon of death is merely a more dramatic ending of this continual process. But the end is not permanent. In fact in the very next "Beat" after death, rebirth takes place. So in Buddhism, death is not 'being called to eternal rest to lie in the bosom of

some creator deity' but a continuation of a process in another form. So there is no need to fear death. In view of this, the Buddha did not prescribe any specific rites regarding the disposal of a corpse. The body of a dead person should be removed with dignity and be treated properly out of respect for the memory of what the deceased person had done when he was alive. His past action (Karma) will determine what his future life will be.

We are grateful for whatever services the dead person had rendered to us in the past. Sorrow arises in our minds because someone we love has departed from our midst. When we gather around the body of a loved one, as friends and relatives we find solace in the company of others who share our common sorrow and who give us moral support in our hour of grief. The different cultural practices we perform are useful because they help us to minimise our sorrow.

Post Mortem

Nowadays in cases where death has occurred in special circumstances which would necessitate further investigation, it has become a common practice for hospitals to conduct post mortems on the bodies of such dead persons to verify the cause of death. Sometimes relatives object to this practice thinking that it is somewhat sacrilegious to cut up or mutilate a corpse. As far as Buddhists are concerned there should be no religious reason to object to this practice. In fact, if such a post mortem could help the living by providing members of the medical profession with more infor-



Organ donation

mation which could enable them to cure diseases it should be considered an act of merit on the part of Buddhists. As has been said earlier the physical body is nothing more than a combination of elements which will disintegrate on death. So there is no reason to believe that the spirit of the dead person will be upset if the body is used for scientific purposes. We can be rest assured that doctors and medical aides have a high sense of responsibility and professional ethics and that they would handle a corpse with the utmost respect due to it, so relatives need not be unduly worried about this. There are some who even pledge to donate their bodies after their death to hospitals for medical students to study anatomy.

In this connection, it is considered an act of the highest merit for Buddhists to donate parts of their bodies after death so that others would benefit from them. The Buddha himself on numerous occasions in his previous lives donated his body for the benefit of others. He gave his eyes, blood and flesh and on one occasion sacrificed his whole body in order to save the lives of others. Buddhism is very clear on the issue — that the donation of vital organs for the benefit of others brings great merit and is to be strongly encouraged.

Funerals

In most cultured and civilised societies a funeral is considered as a sad and solemn occasion. A Buddhist funeral should accordingly be a solemn occasion and should be conducted as such.

There is a widespread superstition among some people that it is “bad luck” to bring a corpse into a home if a person has died elsewhere. We are bound to show our respect for the memory of the dead person to treat the body with proper respect by giving it a decent funeral. Whether the body is brought home or not depends on what is most convenient for the bereaved members of the family. In this connection we should also mention that there should be no fears or taboos regarding the handling of a dead person. Some people are afraid to touch a corpse thinking they will be faced with “bad luck”. If this were true doctors and nurses should be the most miserable people on earth! If we truly wish to honour the memory of our departed ones,



Burning paper objects cannot help the dead

we should bathe and dress the body and not leave it to some stranger from an undertaker's firm to do it for us. Remember that superstition ignorance and irrational fear brings more "bad luck" than gratitude, love and good taste.

Contrary to popular belief, the noisy, elaborate and sometimes showy or grand funeral processions costing thousands of dollars on unnecessary things and which are often regarded as normal 'Buddhist practices', are in fact not Buddhist practices at all. It is a total misconception to associate all these practices with

Buddhism. They are just the perpetuation of age-old customs and traditions handed down from past generations which are being adhered to blindly. When viewing such funeral rites people of other faiths often wonder whether what they are watching is a procession celebrating some happy festival or a solemn funeral.

Quite often a loud music instead of solemn music, is performed during a funeral procession. One would therefore gain the impression that the ceremony is designed more to make an outward show of affluence rather than to express genuine sorrow and respect for the deceased. Although Buddhism does not object to perpetuating cultural practices, so long as they are not in conflict with the teachings of the Buddha, it is felt that wasteful, uneconomical and unnecessary practices which are not beneficial either to the departed or the living should be discouraged or discarded altogether. For example, the traditional practice of burning paper money, joss-paper and symbolic paper houses, designed purportedly for the benefit of a deceased person for use in the life hereafter, is definitely unBuddhistic. However, if it helps one psychologically to minimise one's sorrow by making him think he is doing something beneficial for the departed, it is harmless, but nonetheless one should not go to extremes or believe it can help the deceased in any way.

Buddhism does not object to different communities performing different funeral rites which are suitable for each locality and time. But the most important thing is that they must be culturally acceptable and practical.

The rites attached to a Buddhist funeral should be simple, solemn, dignified and meaningful. In many countries Buddhist monks are invited to the house of the deceased to perform religious rites prior to a funeral. The offering of flowers and the burning of a few joss-sticks and candles are normally accepted religious practices on such an occasion.

It is customary as a mark of respect, for friends and relatives to send wreaths of flowers for the funeral. These should preferably be ordered so as to arrive at the house not earlier than the afternoon before the funeral, otherwise on the sad day itself they may be faded. However if the obituary notice specifically states "no flowers", then this request should be strictly respected.

Because relatives have different opinions on funeral rites there are many arguments about the proper rituals to be performed. People have often asked the following questions:

1. Should there be a burial or cremation?
2. If cremation, what does one do with the ashes?
3. What kind of coffin must we use?
4. Must we wear black or white mourning clothes?
5. What colour of candles must be used, red or white?
6. How many days must the body be kept before burial or cremation?
7. What is the limit of expenditure for a funeral?

All these questions can simply be answered in this way:

The funeral must be simple, with the least amount

of fuss, but with dignity. Perhaps the most sensible thing to do would be for the immediate members of the family and close friends to have an informal discussion on the best way to conduct the funeral service in conformity with prevailing practice, with quiet dignity and without incurring unnecessary expense. If they are unable to attend to this themselves, then it is advisable that this be left to a reputable undertaker as he would understand all that is to be done and thus will take much trouble and responsibility off the relatives' hands. Advice may be also sought from a respectable monk who can really guide the family as to what would be the best way to conduct a funeral in a befitting manner that would be in accordance with the Buddhist way of life. It has to be remembered that as far as Buddhist rites are concerned there are no hard and fast rules to be strictly observed. In this as in all matters we must always try to follow the Buddha's advice to maintain moderation and respectability in whatever we do, without causing harm to others. If we can use the occasion to contemplate with gratitude the good work done by the deceased during his life time, to remember that we ourselves will have to depart some day and that we should do whatever good we can for so long as we live, then our contribution would be meaningful and dignified.

What is the proper attire for a funeral? In Buddhism we are advised to always dress decently and moderately. There is no hard and fast rules as to what we should wear at a funeral, but good taste dictates that we should dress sombrely and discard ornaments

in deference to the feelings of the bereaved family and out of respect for the memory of the deceased. A woman in mourning may perhaps wear her wedding or engagement ring. It is better to wear clothes which are in black, white, grey or some such related colour but the matter is entirely left to the individual and his sense of propriety even though 'black' is normally recognised as the accepted symbol for mourning.

How long should a body be kept before burial or cremation? We who live in a hot and humid climate should understand that decomposition takes place very fast and that it is unhygienic to keep a body for far too long. Besides, it would impose a great strain on the relatives of the deceased in having to bear with the proximity of the corpse for a period longer than is really necessary. Also certain mourners out of sheer emotional grief tend to kiss the body and touch it excessively. This is understandable given the strong emotional feelings that people have to bear, but it should not be overdone or encouraged. While one cannot dictate exactly as to how long a body should be kept, it is wise not to unnecessarily prolong the rites. As a general rule it seems most practical to allow a lapse of about a day or two for funeral arrangements to be made and for friends or relatives to be informed.

On the day of the funeral, the services of Buddhist monks would again be called on to perform the necessary religious service at the home and at the cemetery. It has been the practice amongst certain people to offer roasted pigs and chickens as symbolic offerings for the deceased. Such a practice is not encouraged in

Buddhism because it involves the killing of innocent animals. To offer sacrificial offerings to the departed ones is definitely against the teachings of the compassionate Buddha and should be discarded. Simple floral tributes together with the burning of incense and candles would suffice as symbolic offerings.

Burial and Cremation

Many Buddhists have asked whether a deceased person should be buried or cremated. Buddhism, being a free religion, is flexible on this issue. There is no hard and fast rule, although in some Buddhist countries, cremation is the normal accepted practice. The choice of one method or another should be in accordance with the last wish of the deceased or be left to the discretion of the next-of-kin.

In the modern concept however, cremation as a hygienic form of disposal of the body, should be encouraged. With the improvement in health standards and the so-called population explosion, usable land is becoming scarce and hence it is advisable to resort to cremation and allow the use of valuable land for the living instead of crowding it with innumerable tombstones.

Whether for burial or cremation, it has been observed that certain people for sentimental reasons, would like to put valuable personal belongings of the deceased into the coffin in the hope and belief that the departed one would in some way benefit by it. It is a fallacy to expect that burial or burning of such belongings would have any merit at all. Instead of

putting such things inside a coffin or a crematorium it would be much more practical and sensible to donate the useful personal belongings, such as clothing, shoes and many other things to the poor and the needy or to some charitable institution. Any help to the poor and needy is an act of merit which benefits the living and the dead. The fear that some people have with regard to the use of belongings of a deceased person is meaningless and unsustainable.

Disposal of Ashes

The question has often been asked whether it would be better to bury the ashes, enshrine them in a building or have them strewn into the sea. The Buddha did not leave any specific instructions on the matter because he wanted us to understand that the body is nothing more than a combination of physical materials which will ultimately return to the same element groups after death. The Buddha taught that the material form of the body is made up of the elements of Solidity, Fluidity, Heat and Motion. Upon death only two elements will remain, namely Solidity and Fluidity which, when reduced to ashes, has no spiritual significance. Because we regard the remains as a reminder of the dead person whom we had once loved, we treat them with respect. But we must not get attached to them or even think that they in any way will have any link with the person who has since died. Buddhism teaches that the life force departs immediately after death and that it takes on another life form elsewhere.



Preserving the ashes of the dead is to satisfy the family members.

The practice of keeping the remains of the dead goes back to our earliest past. In those days when people believed in a permanent life force, it was the practice like in the case of the Egyptians to preserve the remains in the hope that the departed spirit would thereby maintain contact with the living. Great imposing tombs and monuments were built around them. But such practices were reserved only for

important personages like kings and religious leaders. The rest of the population's remains were simply disposed of in any suitable way.

In contrast to this there is another practice, namely that of ancestral worship whereby the living maintained contacts with the dead by observing ritualistic practices around the dead. This gave rise to the practice of preserving the ashes in urns or other receptacles to be revered – a practice which is still being carried on even to this day.

Some people wish to enshrine the remains in a building while others bury them. Another method is to throw the ashes into the sea or a river. This is basically a Hindu custom where the belief is that the remains will ultimately be re-united with the original creative force.

There is no harm in adopting any of these methods but they must not be considered as being specifically Buddhist or which Buddhists must follow. Also we should not get the wrong idea that by keeping the remains in a holy place like a temple the departed person will be “safe” from having to experience the effects of his karma. It is alright as a mark of respect in the memory of the dead, but nothing more. In Buddhism, the manner of disposing of the remains of the deceased is for the bereaved family to decide so long as good taste and decorum prevail.

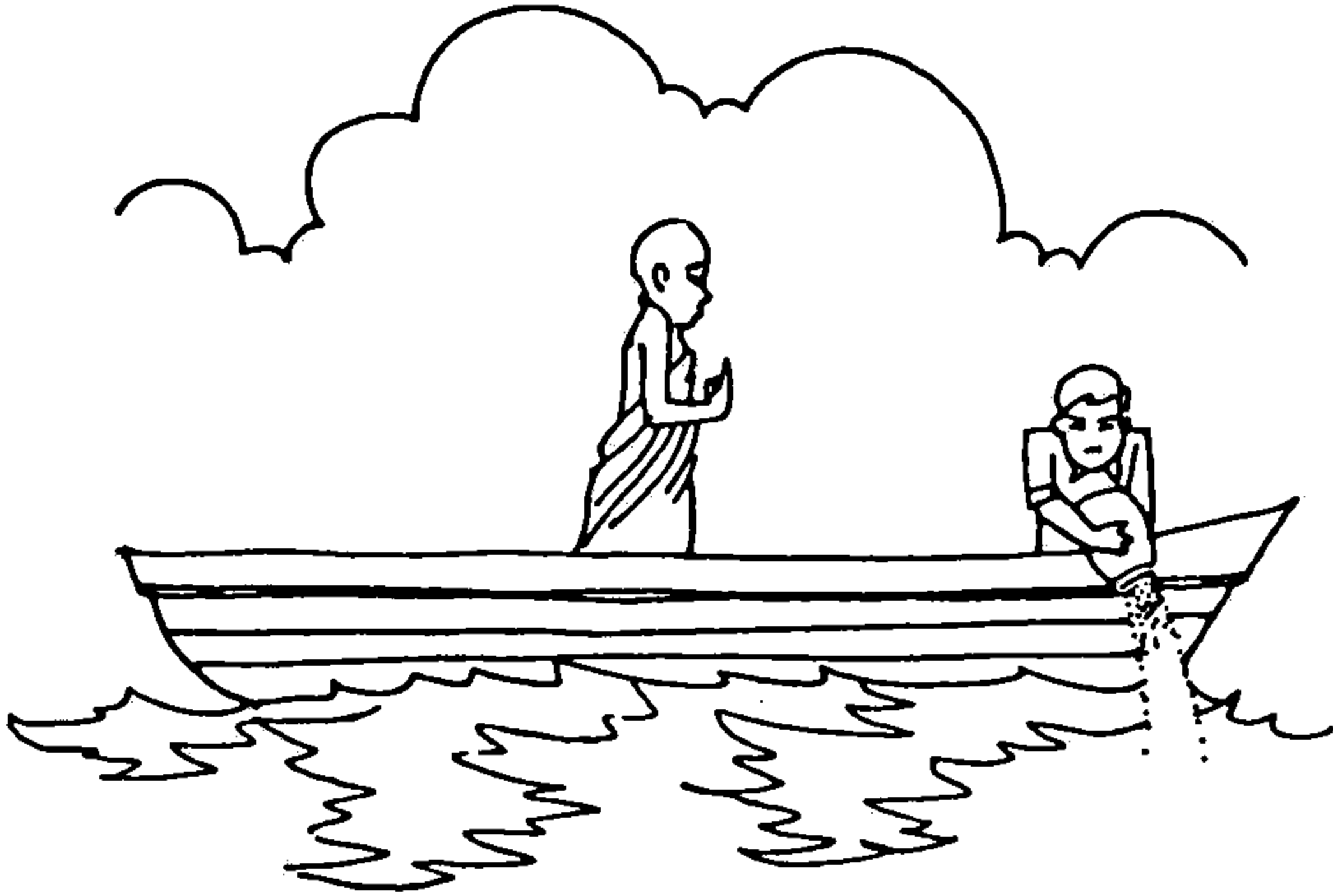
Period of Mourning

When a person dies, close relatives usually spend a certain period of time in mourning. The length

of the mourning period depends upon the tie which existed between the deceased and members of the bereaved family. During this time they dress in a certain way, abstain from most forms of merrymaking and entertainment. Some people wear white, others black and some do not attend weddings or other celebrations until a year has passed and so on. These are not specifically "Buddhist" observances because the Buddhist scriptures do not refer to them as such. However different communities have developed certain rites based on their own cultural practices and these have come to be accepted as being "Buddhist". Their intention is to honour the memory of a departed one, to remind one of his own mortality and so develop a greater sense of spiritual awareness. If intelligently followed, and if these practices do not interfere with the necessary process of living, then as Buddhists we have no reason to object to them. **The Buddhist Way is the Middle Way, the Path of Moderation in All Things.**

Post-Funeral Rites and Memorial Services

Then there are questions about post-funeral rites. Some people hold prayer services for the deceased on the seventh day, forty-ninth day and on the one hundredth day while others, besides the seventh day, do it after three months and one year. Some people do believe that the spirit of the dead would return during these specific times. But whether or not we believe in this is not important. A sensible



The ashes of the dead may be cast in the sea

religious service in memory of the dead where friends and relatives gather to share a spiritual experience and to give moral support to reduce the grief of the bereaved family is ennobling. But there is no necessity to insist that the service must be held on a specific date. Any date convenient to all concerned should be acceptable for the performance of the service.

CHENG BENG or **ALL SOULS'** day is not a Buddhistic term or practice. But it is certainly a good gesture when a whole community sets aside a special day to remember their departed ones by collectively cleaning the cemetery, and offering flowers as a mark of respect. This would indicate that the deceased's descendants are filial and have fulfilled their obligations to their forbears. Buddhism does not object in anyway to this excellent exercise in gratitude and remembrance enabling the young to show respect for their elders and to emulate a good traditional practice

of honouring the spirits of departed ancestors. However, the fear that some people create in the minds of innocent people that the departed will return to torment or disturb the family members if they do not perform certain rituals is groundless.

Alms Giving

It is a common practice in most communities to conduct religious services for the dead during the prescribed periods following the funeral. The Buddhist practice is to partake in almsgiving and to transfer merits to the departed. To do this relatives and friends of the deceased usually invite a number of monks and offer them requisites such as food and medicine. These offerings which contribute to the material welfare of holy people is considered to be an act of merit. Understanding Buddhists also extend



Money spent on doing good works benefits the dead

their donations to charitable institutions, needy persons and religious building projects as well as to publish free religious booklets and literature for distribution to the public to perpetuate the memory of the departed ones. The devotees who give the offerings do so with pure hearts and develop a wholesome state of mind. They do these good deeds in memory of the dead person, and develop wholesome mental links with the dead person. If the departed one is in a favourable position to receive these mental radiations (**transference of merits**) he will be greatly benefited. If on the other hand he is not in such a position, then the good deeds are not wasted because they will help the living persons who generated such good thoughts to reach a higher level of spiritual well-being. Buddhist monks in any temple will gladly assist members of the bereaved family with regard to what needs to be done to conduct such an almsgiving service.

Conclusion

It is fervently hoped that our local Buddhist leaders would take due cognizance of some of the foregoing prevalent practices which are negative in character and other prejudices with a view to causing reform to be effected so that whatever practices that are being carried out by us would be more meaningful. It is felt that our leaders should conduct a basic reappraisal of current practices and recognize the urgent need to bring about such reform through public education and the widest possible publicity be directed towards this end.

THE AIM AND WAY OF LIFE

by Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

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The AIM and Way of LIFE

by Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

As human beings we must have an aim in our life. A person not observing a righteous way of life will never find the aim of life and if he does not uphold some noble principles he can even become a danger to society. No doubt scientists and psychologists have widened our intellectual horizon, but they have not likewise been able to give us a purpose in life, which only noble principles could do.

Religion also originally developed as humanism to uphold humane qualities. Later, it was introduced as a divine law. However, a noble way of life is needed to maintain our human values and dignity. The noble way of life to be discussed here is a proven method wherein by cultivating the mind one could gain

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supreme wisdom.

Countries in which attempts were made to supplant the noble principles of religion with socialism or materialism have been proved to be modern day failures. It is apparent that human beings must have some noble principles to gain confidence in life.

Human beings must choose a rational and meaningful way of life based on their firm conviction and not one founded on mere mythological beliefs, traditional practices and theories. One should not force anyone to accept any particular religious laws nor exploit his or her state of poverty, illiteracy or emotions to induce that person to accept their beliefs.

A person should be free to choose a reasonable way of life according to his or her understanding capacity. Following a religion blindly only abuses human intelligence and dignity. Human beings have common sense to distinguish between right and wrong. They can adapt themselves to changing circumstances.

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They should therefore choose a respectable way of life that is suitable and one that measures up to their expectations. They must be properly guided in this respect and then given a chance to decide for themselves without recourse to any form of coercion.

The Middle-Way

The noble way of life that is being introduced here is a practical educational system of mental culture known to the world some twenty five centuries ago. The founder of this way of life was a most enlightened and compassionate teacher. This method is also variously known as the *Middle-Path*, *a righteous way of life*, *an ethico-philosophical system*, *a do-it-yourself method* and also can be introduced as *a path of freedom and reason*. It teaches us to do three things; namely, *to refrain from doing bad deeds*, *to be of some service to others* and *to maintain a healthy pure mind*.

This message is very meaningful and

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practical. Yet, people experience difficulties when they try to put them into practice. The reason for this is due to their own inherent human weaknesses. The moral conduct of human beings plays a most important part in this way of life. Its great teacher once said, **“My teaching is not to come and believe but to practise.”** It encourages people to study the teachings fully to allow them to judge for themselves whether they should accept the teachings or not. No one is asked to come and accept this way of life without first having had an understanding of its teachings.

Superfluous rites and rituals, and animal sacrifices have no significance in this noble way of life. Superstitious beliefs, fear of supernatural beings and secret doctrines are not encouraged. People have the liberty to investigate for themselves the teachings and to ask questions so as to clear their doubts. According to the teacher of this way of life, one should not believe help one to bear

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anything merely because the founder of this noble method happened to be a great sage or because it had all along been traditionally accepted by many; but only by reasoning and common sense can one decide to accept it. This teacher also advises any one not to accept nor to reject anything hastily on impulse but to investigate it thoroughly before coming to a final decision.

Noble Path

The noble eight-fold path taught in this way of life is Perfect-understanding, Perfect-thought, Perfect-speech, Perfect-action, Perfect-livelihood, Perfect-effort, Perfect-mindfulness and Perfect-concentration. This unique middle path is a code of morality which paves the way for people to lead a noble and peaceful life.

The middle path is neither a metaphysical nor a ritualistic path; it is neither dogmatism nor scepticism; neither self-indulgence nor self-torture; neither eternalism nor nihilism; neither

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a law given by some divine authority nor a mere imagination of man. It is a path of Enlightenment, a means of deliverance from suffering or unsatisfactoriness. This way of life rejects the idea that human beings are suffering today because of their original sins. Every living thing, including plant life, experiences suffering. Every person carries his or her merits and demerits individually. Human beings are solely responsible for their own pain or pleasure.

One who follows the middle path should find real peace and happiness. One should be able to lead a respectable life without being a slave to any form of belief, thus contributing to one's peace and happiness by living in complete harmony with others and the environment.

Reap What You Sow

This way of life satisfies humanity's most profound and lofty aspirations. Yet it is able to

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the stress and strain of everyday life, besides giving a purpose to life. It does not instil fear in people. *Good begets good and bad begets bad. Every action has its reaction.* These are universal laws. This way of life fully agrees with these fundamental laws and people have to abide by them and 'reap what they sow'.

People perpetrate evil deeds out of greed, anger and ignorance. Such weaknesses can only be overcome through self-realisation. The fortunes and misfortunes people experience in this world are not due to some external influences but to the good and bad actions, words and deeds they themselves had previously committed. For this very reason, this teaching says: "We are the results of what we were, and we will be the results of what we are." That means we are responsible for everything in our life.

Forgiveness of sin is not acknowledged in this way of life. One is solely responsible for one's own actions, good or bad. If one has

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committed evil, one has to face up to the consequences. The only way to purge the mind of evil is to do only good. It is only through a long process of mental training that the mind could become purified.

This way of life teaches that death is not the end of life. A living being is just a bundle of energies holding the elements together. The physical death of a being is just an interlude in the repeated cycle of birth and death. Therefore, a being 'not the same and not different' continues to live, life after life, until the aim of life is finally attained.

According to this teaching, cause and effect play a very important part in our lives. In a cycle of cause and effect, a first cause is inconceivable for the cause ever becomes the effect, and the effect in turn becomes the cause. Everything that exists is interdependent.

A Great Teacher

The founder of this unique method is not a

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myth but a Great Teacher who actually lived in this world. He never tried to present himself as a supernatural being but as a human being who had himself realised the absolute truth: the cosmic or universal law, the secret of life and the real cause of suffering and happiness. He makes no claim to divinity.

Today, this teacher is not only honoured by hundreds of millions of his followers but also by the cultured people and intellectuals throughout the world. Although this Noble Man, this Liberator, this Social Reformer, this Democrat and Inspirer had passed away, he left behind a noble message for humanity to follow in order to eliminate human suffering, misery, fear, worry and unsatisfactoriness. From his message one can gain happiness in this life and in the life hereafter: the ultimate liberation of all human suffering.

This great teacher comforted the bereaved. He helped the poor who were neglected. He ennobled the lives of the deluded and purified

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the lives of criminals. He consoled the weak, united the divided, enlightened the ignorant, clarified the doubts of mystics, elevated those debased and dignified the noble. Both the rich and the poor, the saintly and the criminal loved him. Despotic or righteous Kings, famous or obscure princes and nobles, generous or stingy millionaires, haughty or intelligent scholars, and destitutes, paupers, down-trodden scavengers, wicked murderers, cannibals, despised courtesans – all benefited by his noble way of life, wisdom and compassion.

His noble example was a source of inspiration to all. His serene and peaceful countenance was indeed soothing to the troubled. His message of peace and tolerance was welcomed by all with indescribable joy and was of lasting benefit to everyone who had the good fortune to hear and to practise it. His iron will, profound wisdom, universal love, boundless compassion, selfless service, brave renunciation, perfect purity, magnetic

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personality, exemplary methods employed to introduce his teachings and his final success – all these factors have inspired about one fifth of the population of the world today to hail and honour this teacher as their supreme master.

This noble teacher sacrificed his worldly pleasures for the sake of suffering humanity to seek the Truth and to show the path of deliverance from suffering. He visited the poor people whilst kings and ministers had to visit him. After his enlightenment he had dedicated 45 years of his life for guiding deluded human beings to lead meaningful, respectable and peaceful lives.

This great teacher feared none nor did he instil fear in others. This is one quality that should be cultivated by all in this war-torn world of ours where the most precious thing – life – is sacrificed at the altar of brute force and where armaments are creating fear, tension and hatred. He also did not create temptations of sensual pleasure as a means to introduce his

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noble way of life.

He was the perfect scientist in the study of life; the perfect psychologist who analysed the nature of the mind to the extent that his teaching was acclaimed as a scientific method. Modern scientific discoveries never come in conflict with his teaching.

To great philosophers and unbiased thinkers, he is a teacher who understood worldly conditions in its proper perspective. To moralists his teaching was the highest code of discipline. He symbolizes perfection. 'He was the perfect model of all the virtues he preached.' To rationalists, he is the most liberal-minded noble teacher. To free-thinkers, he is a teacher who encouraged people to think independently to find out the truth. To agnostics, he is a very gentle and understanding teacher who guided humanity.

He was no doubt the most persuasive of all the great teachers. He never used compulsion or fear as a means of gaining converts. He has

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introduced a noble way of life without even attaching a religious label to it. What he wanted was to see people living in harmony as cultured, harmless and contented human beings by upholding his noble advice.

He was the humble servant of humanity, unperturbed by either praise or blame. He did not ask people to come and worship him or pray to him in order to gain salvation. He did not introduce his message by means of charismatic techniques or so called miraculous powers but by educating and convincing the public.

Peace, Happiness and Salvation

Today, the message of peace of this Great Universal Teacher is more important than ever before particularly at a time when human beings are intoxicated with power, greed, jealousy, pride and craving for world domination.

This teacher was born to this world to dispel

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the darkness of ignorance, and to save the world from its ills. It is common knowledge that throughout the world many people continue to live without practising any form of noble life. However, if they would only make an effort to study and understand what this Great Teacher had taught, they could clarify their doubts, and be convinced of his teaching that could best contribute to find the aim of life.

Whether one believes in him or not, his teaching had a profound effect on all people. His message was spread without any violence. It is a significant fact that not a single drop of blood had ever been shed in its name. This is indeed a most remarkable record in world history which could be written in letters of gold. This teaching illuminates the way by which humanity could cross from a world of unsatisfactoriness to a world of light, love, peace and happiness.

The twenty five century old teaching of this great teacher is strong enough to face any

challenge without flinching or having the need to reinterpret its original doctrines; because the doctrine he preached is for all time and is the absolute truth.

The teaching considers virtue as one of the prerequisites for the attainment of liberation from worldly suffering. The other prerequisite is wisdom. Virtue is like a vehicle that brings one up to the gate of liberation, but the actual key that opens the gate is wisdom.

Heavenly Bliss

The followers of this way of life do not regard themselves as the chosen people to gain heavenly bliss. They believe that a person creates his or her own hell and heaven depending on that person's conduct and way of life. Sufferings in hell or heavenly bliss also can be experienced in this earthly life itself instead of in the life hereafter, as is commonly believed.

This noble teacher never preached by

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frightening people with hell fire or with alluring everlasting heavenly life, but only by revealing the true nature of life and the universe. According to his teaching, anyone can enjoy heavenly bliss so long as one leads a righteous way of life. Heaven is not reserved for any one particular group in a religious community. It is open to all - anyone who leads a noble life.

Tolerance, patience and understanding are considered virtues in his teaching. In addition, loving kindness, compassion and sympathy towards others are not confined to human beings but also extended to all living beings - since destruction of life, be it human or animal, is cruel and unjust, and is against the teaching of this great teacher.

For harmony's sake this teacher also advises his followers to respect other people's views and to accept the truth wherever it may be. He advocated tolerance towards traditions and cultural practices of others if they are

harmless.

Way of Life

This way of life is clear, reasonable and gives complete answers to all important questions and problems about life. It provides a solid foundation for helping humanity towards building a positive and better way of life.

This method does not divide humanity into two groups, the “saved” and the “lost”. As a civilised and understanding system, it teaches us how to tame the wild and to refine the tamed.

Followers of this way of life do not indulge in petitional prayer. They believe in the importance of self-exertion and in the efficacy of meditation for self-conquest, self-control, self purification, and enlightenment. Meditation serves as a tonic for the body as well as the mind.

One Can Mould One's Life

This method contends that mind is the all

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powerful force - the creator and destroyer of humankind as well as the architect of humanity's fate. Therefore, one should be capable of moulding anything if only one knows how to develop and make proper use of the mind.

In fact, this way of life has been an admirable beacon of light radiating on the hill for guiding humanity to fulfil the aim of life. Through this method people can dispel the darkness of ignorance. By following the guidance given in this way of life, people learn how to use their life to the fullest to be meaningful. It is true that the world today is riddled with racial, political, religious, communal and ideological differences. To solve these complex problems, people must exercise the spirit of benevolence and tolerance towards each other. This noble method inculcates ethical-moral co-operation for the universal good. Humanity must realise that spiritual development is more important than material

development for human happiness. Truth, service, charity and love must be practised if this world is to be turned into a better place for us to live in.

Actuality

This liberal teacher through his enlightenment, declared that :-

- The greatest virtue is that gained in the cultivation of universal love;
- The supreme happiness is the happiness derived from mental calmness;
- The absolute truth is acquired through the understanding of the causes of human suffering;
- The highest religion is one that teaches supreme wisdom, morality and mental purification; and
- The greatest philosophy is the philosophy that introduces analytical knowledge and a practical way of life without depending on theories and mere beliefs.

This way of life does not obstruct anyone

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from reading and learning the teachings of other religions. It has no place for fanaticism. A fanatic cannot be guided by reason or even by the scientific principle of observation and analysis. Therefore, the followers of this method are endowed with an open mind and are not subservient to anyone for spiritual development.

If you care to learn a little more about the moral code of ethics and mental training which this teaching has to offer, you might have to review any previous misunderstandings you would have had about this way of life. One should not pre-judge any particular way of life by just looking at certain aspects of devotional, traditional and emotional practices. Instead, one should always try to make an in-depth study and understand the fundamental teachings of the teachers.

Credit To Human Intelligence

Instead of placing human destiny under the arbitrary control of an unknown external agency

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and becoming subservient to such a supreme power, this way of life has raised the status of humanity. It accorded human beings the intelligence that is their just due. It taught people how to cultivate their submerged human potential.

This teacher tells us how to render selfless service to others. Those who follow this way of life abstain from evil not out of fear of retribution from some unseen being but out of self-realisation that evil would only bring about suffering to living beings. Their motive of doing good to help others is done not to please any supreme being in expectation of an ultimate reward, but out of feelings of compassion towards them in order to release them from their sufferings.

In this way of life we can find a method to perfect goodness and wisdom. We can achieve the highest wisdom through realisation and not 'revelation'. We can attain redemption without the assistance of a vicarious redeemer. We can

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gain salvation within this life-time by the judicious exercise of our own faculties without waiting for the life hereafter.

This way of life teaches that human beings are not for religion but that religion is for humanity. Without becoming slaves to any particular religion, human beings must make use of religion for their own betterment and liberation. In other words, people can practise this method as noble human beings without having to undergo suffering in the name of any form of belief. This way of life does not prohibit the experiencing of sensual pleasures in a reasonable and respectable way if it is conducted within the bounds of accepted noble principles.

Is It Possible?

- Without belief in immortality can people gain confidence in life and be moral?
- Without help from any supreme authority and law-giver can people become righteous?

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- Without rites and rituals can people lead a noble way of life?
- Without emotional faith and beliefs can people lead a noble life?
- Without depending on a supernatural being can people gain their final salvation?
- Without suffering through certain religious penances can people attain liberation?
- Without creating fear in the mind can people follow certain noble principles?
- Without using force to threaten others, can we introduce a proper way of life?
- Without resorting to superstitious beliefs and dogmas is it possible to convince the masses to lead a pure life?
- Can people appreciate a meaningful life without following mysticism, occultism, supernatural powers and priestcraft?

Yes, said the founder of this noble way of life. These ends could be attained by altruistic service, by purity, discipline and wisdom.

The realisation of the law of cause and

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effect as explained by this teacher clarifies and helps to solve the problems of human sufferings, the 'mystery' of fate and predestination, and above all the inequality of humanity. Through understanding of this universal law, one can gain consolation, hope, self-reliance and moral courage.

This righteous way of life is one of the greatest and richest human civilising forces that the world has ever known. It has a notable history of achievement in art, literature, philosophy, ethics and in the social and educational institutions which, in the course of centuries, has brought into being among the nations whose allegiance it had won. From the very outset, it appealed most strongly to the intellectuals. It was this way of life that first called architecture into the service of noble life. The history of this message was written in the name of brotherhood and goodwill. The concept of life and the world changed from the day that this doctrine was preached.

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This noble way of life was not planned in heaven but nurtured in the purified human mind. It was born in a long experimental process. This is a method to study, to practise, and to experience the results in the end. Its contribution to a real noble way of life is most ancient and yet most modern. Its teaching of causation, its relativism, doctrine of sense-data, pragmatism, its emphasis on morals, its disbelief in any permanent soul, its unconcern about a creator God, eternal heaven and eternal hell, its denial of rituals and its appeal to one's own experience, all tend to establish its superior claim to modernity.

Noble Life in a Modern Society

It has every quality required of a rational way of life to fit into the present and future world. It will be beneficial for anyone to study and to appreciate it in the modern world. It is acknowledged to be more scientific than science itself and more progressive than all the

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known progressive elements in spiritual development. It is one of the most effective means for the maintenance of world peace, harmony and understanding.

No Discrimination

It was this way of life which was the first to revolt against the degrading caste system. It taught humanity to accord equal opportunities for all to distinguish themselves in every walk of life. This way of life was also the first in giving freedom to women to study and to practise to achieve spiritual development.

The Great Teacher declared that the gates to success and prosperity are open to all, in every stage of life whether high or low, saintly or criminal, who would care to seek and aspire for perfection. He did not make his followers slaves either to himself or to his teachings but instead granted them complete freedom of thought and investigation to gain self-confidence for themselves.

This system classifies living beings into mind and matter which are in a state of constant change, not remaining the same for two consecutive moments. Mind and matter arise and perish and the continuous cycle goes on. Therefore nothing will remain permanently either in this world or elsewhere in the universe. Because everything which exists in the universe is nothing but a combination of elements and energies, it is quite natural that these things will one day disintegrate and disappear. This teaching also tells us that every existing component thing is subject to change and conflict because of worldly conditions.

The main principles recommended in this way of life are not commandments. By observing precepts such as abstaining from Killing, Stealing, Sexual Misconduct, Telling Lies and Taking drinks and drugs which cause infatuation and heedlessness, the followers of this noble way of life can purify themselves through good thoughts, good speech and good

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action, and thereby living in harmony with others or by allowing others also to live peacefully.

Our Aim

Our aim in publishing this booklet is to enlighten people on how to seek inner peace and happiness and to practise their own noble way of life with firm conviction. We encourage people to practise their own way of life properly if truth, peace, happiness, wisdom and salvation can be found in it. What we want is for everyone to lead a respectable life without abusing one's innate human dignity.

In fact, this way of life may be the answer to many of your spiritual and human problems. It may give fresh impetus and direction to your way of thinking on devotional and philosophical matters. It may also help you to understand your own way of life. You may find here the spiritual guidance the modern world badly needs.

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This teaching brought into the world a new spirit, a new hope, a new path, the truth and necessity of which is evident everywhere and felt today as it was in days of old. The way of life referred to here is *Buddhism* and its founder is none other than *Gautama the Buddha* - the Enlightened One.

Whatever may be your purpose in life, we invite you to take a closer look at this way of life and the ideals expounded by its founder. We are ready to help you in your search for truth. Therefore, be unbiased, avoid religious prejudices in your noble endeavour to find the ultimate truth and the aim of life. The aim of life is nothing but finding the end of physical and mental suffering.

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Problems & Responsibilities

By Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

Are you worried? Are you miserable? If so, you are invited to read this booklet to develop a better understanding of your problems. It is dedicated to you and to those who worry.

Fear and Worry

Fear and worry are born of the imaginings of a mind that is influenced by worldly conditions. They are rooted in craving and attachment. In fact, life is like a motion picture in which everything is constantly moving and changing. Nothing in this world is permanent or still. Those who are youthful and strong have fear of dying young. Those who are old and suffering worry about living too long. Locked in between are those who craze for merriment all the year round.

Joyful expectations of the pleasant seem to pass

off too quickly. Fearful expectations of the unpleasant create anxieties that do not seem to go away. Such feelings are natural. Such ups and downs of life play with an illusory self or ego like puppets on a string. But the mind is supreme unto itself.

The training of the mind, otherwise known as mental culture, is the first step towards taming mental unrest. The Buddha has explained:

*"From craving springs grief,
from craving springs fear,
For him who is wholly free from craving,
there is no grief, much less fear."*

All attachments will end in sorrow. Neither tears nor long goodbyes can end the transitoriness of life. All compounded things are impermanent.

Old and young suffer in this existence. No one is exempted. Many teenagers have growing pains. Being neither frogs nor tadpoles, teenagers are understandably inexperienced at building stable relationships with members of the opposite sex. They try to show off their beauty in trying to impress their opposite sex who are flattered to see

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themselves as sex objects. Both try to behave not as they really are but as what they think is adult. They are afraid that if they behave naturally they will be laughed at. Behaviour like this has the potential for exploitation. There is fear of rejection as well as worry about deflated egos. Unrequited love will often 'break' many teenage hearts because they feel they have made 'fools of themselves'. Some are even driven to commit suicide. But such traumas could be avoided if life is seen as it really is. Young people must be taught the Buddhist approach to life, so that they can grow into maturity the correct way.

"Wheresoever fear arises, it arises in the fool, not in the wise man." says the Buddha. Fear is nothing more than a state of mind. One's state of mind is subject to control and direction; the negative use of thought produces fear; the positive use realizes hopes and ideals. The choice rests entirely with ourselves. Every human being has the ability to control his own mind. Nature has endowed man with absolute control over one thing, and that is thought. Everything a man creates begins in the

form of a thought. Here is the key to help one understand the principle by which fear may be mastered.

A noted British anatomist was once asked by a student what was the best cure for fear, and he answered, *"Try doing something for someone."*

The student was considerably astonished by the reply, and requested further enlightenment whereupon his instructor said, *"You can't have two opposing sets of thoughts in your mind at one and the same time."* One set of thoughts will always drive the other out. If, for instance, your mind is completely occupied with an unselfish desire to help someone else, you can't be harbouring fear at the same time.

"Worry dries up the blood sooner than age." Fear and worry in moderation are natural instincts of self-preservation. But constant irrational fear and prolonged worry are relentless enemies to the human body. They derange the normal bodily functions.

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Control your Mind

Man's mind influences his body profoundly. The mind has just as much potential to be a medication as it has to be a poison. When the mind is vicious, it can kill a being but when it is steady and diligent it can benefit others. When the mind is concentrated on right thoughts, and supported by right effort and understanding, the effect it produces is immense. A mind with pure and wholesome thoughts leads to healthy relaxed living.

The Buddha says: *"No enemy can harm one so much as one's own thoughts of craving, thoughts of hate, thoughts of jealousy and so on."*

A man who does not know how to adjust his mind according to circumstances is as if dead. Turn your mind inwards, and try to find pleasure within yourself.

It is only when the mind is controlled and properly directed that it becomes useful to its owner and society. An unruly mind is a liability both to its owner and to others. All the havoc wrought in this world is the creation of men who have not learned the way of mind control, balance

and poise.

Calmness is not weakness. A calm attitude at all times shows a man of culture. It is not too hard for one to be calm when things are favourable, but to be composed when things are wrong is hard indeed. It is this difficult quality that is worth achieving, for by exercising such calm and control, a man builds strength of character.

The Voice of Nature

Modern man does not listen to the voice of nature because of his preoccupation with material gain and pleasure. His mental activities are so preoccupied with worldly pleasures that he neglects the needs of his spiritual self. This unnatural behaviour of contemporary man immediately results in a wrong world view of human life and its ultimate purpose. It is the cause of all the frustration, anxiety, fear and insecurity of our present times.

If man is cruel and wicked, lives against the laws of nature and the cosmos, his acts, words and thoughts pollute the whole atmosphere. Nature abused will not provide what man requires for his

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living; instead, clashes, conflicts, epidemics and disasters will be in store for him.

If man lives in accordance with this natural law, leads a righteous life, purifies the atmosphere through the merits of his virtues and radiates his compassionate love towards other living beings, he can bring about human happiness. One who really likes peace should not violate another man's freedom. It is wrong to disturb and deceive others.

You may be a very busy person, but spend at least a few minutes a day in meditation or in reading some valuable books. This habit will relieve you of your worries and will develop your mind. Religion is for your benefit. Therefore, it is your duty to think about your religion. Spare some time to attend gatherings held in a religious atmosphere. Even a short period spent in the company of spiritually inclined people will produce good results.

Mental Health and Criminal Tendencies

The increase of all kinds of mental ailments and disturbances is the most alarming of all diseases of

the modern age. There are more and more mentally sick patients all over the world; especially in affluent countries.

In many cases the criminal element within our society is mentioned in the same breath as mental illness. One positive and far-reaching result stemming directly from the research work of Freud, is the recognition that criminals and delinquents are mentally sick people, who need treatment rather than punishment. It is this liberal outlook on the problem that is the basis of all “progressive” social reform to replace punishment with rehabilitation.

Know Thy Neighbour

When we do not see how other people live, we may not learn the different ways of living. Travel is the best form of education. Personal encounters with people different from ourselves make us feel more sympathetic. Intolerance is often born of ignorance of another person's needs and way of thinking.

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Man's Unhappiness

The Buddha taught that all of man's unhappiness results from selfish desire: more pleasure that money can buy, more power over other men, and, most important of all, to live forever, even after death! The desire for these things makes people selfish. They think only of themselves, want things only for themselves, and do not care about what happens to other people. When their wishes are not fulfilled, they become restless and discontented. The only way to avoid this restlessness is to get rid of the desires that cause it. This is very difficult; but when a man achieves it, he appreciates it.

Time will Heal Our Wounds

Trouble passes. What has caused you to burst into tears will soon be forgotten. You may remember that you cried but not why you did so! As we grow up and go through life, we are often surprised at how we lie awake at night brooding over something that has upset us during the day, or how we nurse resentment against someone by letting the same thoughts run through our minds concerning

how to have our own back. We may fall into a rage at the spur of the moment over something, and later wonder what it was we were so angry about, and be surprised to realise what a waste of time and energy it had all been. We have deliberately gone on being unhappy when we could have stopped being so and started thinking about something else more wholesome.

Whatever our troubles are, and however aggrieved we may feel, time will heal our wounds. But surely there must be something we can do to prevent ourselves from being hurt in the first place. Why should we allow others or troubles to drain away our energy and make us unhappy? The answer is that they do not. It is we who make ourselves unhappy.

You may have some trouble in your work place but you should not infect your home with a bad atmosphere. You should realise that there is an end to those problems. The solutions could be found in achieving freedom from our selfish desires by eradicating all forms of confusion and ignorance.

Whenever we fail to find a solution to a problem,

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we are inclined to find a scapegoat, to vent our frustration. We are not prepared to admit our own shortcomings. It is easier to put the blame on others. In fact, some even take pleasure in doing so. This is a completely wrong attitude to adopt. We must not show resentment towards others. We should do our utmost, pains-takingly and calmly, to resolve our own problems. We must be prepared to face up to any difficulties that we encounter.

Healthy Atmosphere

Jokes and remarks directed at you in bad taste should be deflected with good humour. This is one way to avoid enmity with anybody. Losing your cool while playing the game will get you strung up. You will forfeit a possible win. That will even spoil the pleasure of those watching the game.

There is no way you can change everyone in this world to your way of thinking. It is not even desirable. If everyone agrees with you, the world will soon run out of ideas.

There are many ways of correcting a person when he is wrong. By criticising, blaming and

railing at him in public, you will be humiliating and not correcting him. Criticism is certain to make more enemies. If you can show concern for a man's future good with kind words, he will thank you for it someday.

Never use harsh or unpleasant words whenever you express your views on issues. Diplomacy, gentleness and politeness do not hurt anybody. In fact they will open many doors.

Do not feel defensive when your own faults are pointed out. Your faults are your signposts for learning perfection. Temper is a poor camouflage for shortcomings. When someone loses his temper he will blurt out too many things better left unsaid. Never reveal a former friend's personal secret no matter how angry you are with him now. You will only degrade yourself in the process and others could never accept you as a sincere friend thereafter. Others will think you could do the same thing you did to injure a former friend: no one will trust you.

Have Courage to face Criticism

Sweetness creates sickness, bitterness comes with

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the cure. Praise is sweetness, an excess of which causes sickness; and criticism is like a bitter pill which cures. We must have the courage to welcome criticism and not be afraid of it.

***“The ugliness we see in others
Is a reflection of our own nature”***

A man's life, circumstances and world are a reflection of his own thoughts and beliefs. All men are mirrors to themselves, sores, ills, and all.

Happiness and Materialism

Many people believe they can solve all their problems by just having money. They however fail to realise that money itself has its attendant problems. Money cannot solve all problems.

Most people never think properly. All through their lives they are like race-track greyhounds running after a rabbit decoy. When the chase ends, all excitement disappears. This is very much like the nature of sensual happiness in the wonderland of materialism. As soon as the desired object is attained, the happiness ends and new desires arise. Getting the object appears not quite as satisfying

as the chase itself.

Or when we lose something, remember the following advice:-

*"Say not that this is yours and that is mine,
Just say, this came to you and that to me,
So we may not regret the fading shine,
Of all the glorious things which ceased to be."*

Wealth is not something for you to accumulate for craving's sake. It is intended for your welfare as well as of others. Try to make the world around you a better place to live in. Use your wealth wisely to reduce the sufferings of the poor, the sick and the aged. Fulfill your duties to your people, your country and your religion. When the time comes for you to leave, imagine what peace and bliss they could bring as you recall the past good and selfless deeds you have done.

To seek wealth through gambling is like expecting a passing cloud to shelter us from the sun. On the other hand, to aspire for prosperity through diligent work is as secure as building a permanent shelter against sun and rain.

"Your property will remain when you die. Your

friends and relatives will follow you up to your grave. But only good or bad actions you have done during your life-time (Karma) will follow you beyond the grave."

Fulfilling dreams of riches may sound magical, but fear and worry always lie in wait for such magic to wear off. A rich lifestyle brings its share of mental disturbance. With an abundance of ill-used wealth, simple things in life like friendship, trust and confidence which are taken for granted in humbler circumstances become impossible to attain. When a lifestyle begins to create insecurity, it requires wisdom to put oneself on the right track again. Riches have their trade-offs; the happiness of owning them is diminished by as much fear and worry about losing them.

For our personal happiness we should acquire wealth righteously. *"Blessed are they who earn their living without harming others"* says the Buddha. Happiness cannot be long-lived and meaningful if wealth leaves sorrow and suffering in its wake. Wealth flouted arouses envy; but wealth well-conducted earns respect.

Your wealth can only edify your house but not you. Only your own virtue can edify you. Your dress can adorn your body but not you. Only your good conduct can.

Ultimately, it is bliss to know that “happiness is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself.” The world may not be what you want it to be but you can tune your heart to find happiness within it. It is only when you have suffered for doing good that you can rise above others in understanding and personal happiness.

“If we want to find happiness, let us stop thinking about gratitude or ingratitude and give for the inner joy of giving. Ingratitude is natural — like weeds. Gratitude is like a rose. It has to be fed, watered and cultivated and loved and protected.”
(Dale Carnegie)

Act Wisely

Man must know how to use his youth, wealth and knowledge at the proper time and place and in the proper way for his own benefit as well as for

others. If he misuses his privilege, it will only cause his down-fall. *"Man must be strong enough to know when he is weak, brave enough to encounter fear, proud and unbending in honest defeat, humble and gentle in victory."*

Some people have blessings of sudden wealth through chance or inheritance. But not many are endowed with the wisdom to protect, conserve or put it to good use. Anything that is not earned through the sweat of one's brow tends to be squandered through abuse.

Adjust Ourselves

Customs and traditions are important bonds for the learning and sharing of human experience in any community. The dilemma we face in an ever changing world is whether to live with or break with the past. There will always be a 'generation gap' between the old and the young because of differing perceptions of changing circumstances and values. The old fear the young may lose their heritage and the young worry that an ancient past may become a stumbling block in modern living.

Change must always be considered carefully.

Popular culture creates momentary idols and folk heroes who portray images of conflicting lifestyles. Mass media helps to reinforce this and young minds are prone to accept everything they stand for. There may be political or social messages in such movements like the Hippie or Yuppie movements but it is vital for the young to have the wisdom of the old to separate the good from the bad. Time-tested and proven good old values do not change. Values like thrift, honesty, liberality and hard work for dignified living remain fresh in any community.

In an Asian setting marriage and funeral customs and traditions are very important. The question is whether we should spend so much money and time to carry out these customs and traditions in the modern world. Are they really necessary? There is no better advice than what the Buddha gave in the Kalama Sutta:

“When you know in yourselves `These ideas are unprofitable, liable to censure, condemned by the wise, being adopted and put into effect they

lead to harm and suffering, then you should abandon them.... When you know in yourselves 'These things are wholesome, blameless, commended by the wise, being adopted and put into effect they lead to welfare and happiness' then you should practise them and abide in them."

Every man is a creature of the universe. So long as man is concerned with humanising society and the re-ordering of the world for the better, time will always bridge the gap between the young and the old. Worry and fear over the direction of change will lose their grip. The old only have to remember how their own parents had objected to certain modern ways of living prevalent at the time when they were young. Tolerance for differences on an issue is a virtue. An open attitude can only be a happy one.

Mind your own Business

It is bliss to be able to attend to your own affairs without entertaining doubts about others. Here is the Buddha's advice :

"One should not accuse others for the mistakes

and things done and left undone by them, but one's own deeds of commission and omission."

"He who is always observant of others' faults, and is irritable, his own defilements increase. He is far from the destruction of defilement."

"Easy to see the faults of others; but one's own is difficult to see. One winnows other's faults like chaff; but one's own one hides as a crafty fowler covers himself."

No one is free from blame and criticism. The Buddha says:

"People blame others for their silence. They blame those who talk much and those who talk in moderation. There is therefore no one in this world who is not blamed." Further He says: "There never was, nor will be, nor is there now, any one who is wholly blamed or wholly praised."

Not all those who criticise you are your enemies. You can use the opportunity of their remarks to find out the weaknesses in yourself which you cannot see.

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You should not give up good work just because of criticism. If you can admit your own weakness, indeed you have the intellectual strength to succeed.

“The noble ones swerve not from the right path, let happen what may and crave no longer after worldly joys. The wise remain calm and constant in mind, alike in joy and in sorrow.”

Be Unbiased

You should not come to any hasty decision regarding any matter when you are in a bad mood or under provocation. Any decision or conclusion reached during such a period would be a matter you could regret one day. Allow your mind to calm down first and think. Then, your judgment will be an unbiased one.

Cultivate tolerance, for tolerance helps you to sympathise with other people's troubles. Avoid unnecessary criticism. Try to realize that even the finest human being is not infallible. The weakness you find in your neighbour can be found in yourself. It has been said that you should not throw

stones at others while staying in glass houses.

Humility

Humility is the wise man's measure for knowing the difference between what is and what is yet to be. "The Buddha himself started His ministry by discarding all His princely pride in an act of self-humiliation. He attained sainthood during His life, but never lost His naturalness, never assumed superior airs. His dissertations and parables were never pompous. He had time for the most humble of men. He never lost His sense of humour."

Waste not your Time

To waste a man's existence in worrying about the future, grieving over the past, or in idleness or heedlessness, is to show his unfitness for the noble place he holds as the best of earthly creatures. He will thus create bad karma which will relegate him to a place befitting his unworthiness. Bear this in mind, and do good while life lasts. By wasting your time, you injure not only yourself but also others, for your time is as much others' as it is yours.

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Patience and Tolerance

Be patient with all. Anger leads one along a blind path. While it irritates and annoys others, it also hurts oneself. Anger weakens the physical body and disturbs the mind. A harsh word, like an arrow discharged from a bow, can never be retrieved even if you would offer a thousand apologies.

Certain creatures cannot see in the day-time whilst some others are blind at night. But a man driven to great heights of hatred does not observe anything, either by day or night.

With whom and with what do you fight when you are angry? You fight with yourself, for you are the worst enemy of yourself. The mind is your best friend but it can easily become your worst foe. Some varieties of heart trouble, rheumatic disorders, and skin diseases are traceable to chronic resentment, hatred and jealousy. Such destructive feelings poison the heart. They foster the development of latent diseases by reducing the body's natural defences against disease microbes.

Returning Good for Evil

If you want to be rid of your enemies, you must first kill the greatest enemy within you — your anger. If you are to be perturbed by distractions from your enemies, it means you are fulfilling the wishes of your enemies by unknowingly entering their trap.

You should not think that you can only learn from those who praise you, help you, and associate with you very closely. You could learn many things from your enemies. You should not think they are entirely wrong just because they happen to be your enemies. They may also possess certain good qualities.

You cannot get rid of your enemies by returning evil for evil; that will only be inviting more enemies. The best method to counter your enemies is to radiate your compassionate love towards them. You may think that this is impossible or something nonsensical. But this is the proven way of every cultured man. When you come to know that there is someone who is very angry with you, you should first try to find out the main cause. If it is due to

your mistake, you should admit it and not hesitate to apologise to him. If it is due to certain misunderstandings between you both, you must enlighten him with a heart to heart talk.

If it is due to jealousy, try radiating your compassionate love. You could influence him by your mental vibrations. You may not be able to understand how it works but the experience of many people has shown that it is the most powerful, intelligent and easy method to win friends. It is highly recommended in Buddhism. Of course, to do this, you must have confidence and patience in yourself. By doing this, you will be able to make your enemy understand that he is in the wrong. Besides, you are also benefited in various ways for not accommodating enmity in your heart.

Compassionate Love

As long as there is one single fellow creature whom you can console by your kind words, whom you can enliven and cheer by your presence, whom you can help with your worldly possessions, however little that charity may be, you are a

precious possession to the human race. You should never be disheartened or depressed.

There may be times when those you love do not seem to care for you, and you are apt to have a heavy heart. But there is no just cause for dejection. What does anything matter so long as you know that you are full of compassion for your fellow men? One should never depend on others for one's happiness. *He who expects to secure satisfaction in life from others is worse than the beggar who kneels and cries for his daily bread.*

The Menace of Drug Abuse & Alcoholism

Alcohol has been described as one of the prime causes of man's physical and moral degradation. Currently, another more vicious form of abuse, that of harmful and dangerous drugs, especially heroin, has created a much more serious human and social problem. This problem is now world-wide. The repercussions of drug abuse are more serious and deadly than those of alcohol. Theft, robbery, sex-related crimes and swindling of vast sums of money have occurred under the pemi-

cious influence of drug abuse.

Drug lords, not being content as death merchants have even tried to control weak governments through corruption, bribery, subversion and bombings. As a matter of public policy, governments have to protect their citizens against drug abuse. Yet, drug lords in their devilish schemes have threatened the very foundation of society — human dignity. Spokesmen of conscience and their families constantly run the risk of death because they dare to cross the lawless path of drug lords.

Without international co-operation to stamp out this evil, the vitality and the future of many nations will be bleak indeed. Worldwide, countless millions of hard-earned dollars have been spent to rid the addicts of their evil habits but the maddening craze persists. It is our duty to help in whatever manner we can, to eradicate this dreadful habit and to prevent our children from ever getting near it.

Life as a drug addict or an alcoholic is a life of torture and hell on earth, leading one to an early

grave.

Drunkenness

Drunkenness expels reason,

Drowns memory,

Defaces the brain,

Diminishes strength,

Inflames the blood,

Causes external and internal incurable wounds.

Is a witch to the body,

A devil to the mind,

A thief to the purse,

The beggar's curse,

The wife's woe,

The children's sorrow,

The picture of a beast,

And self murder,

Who drinks to other's health,

And robs himself of his own.

As human beings, we should have self-control to distinguish between what is good and evil. Keep away from drug abuse and alcoholism and help

others to do so. That will be the greatest service to humanity.

You Create Heaven and Hell here

“If you want to live in this world peacefully and happily, allow others also to live peacefully and happily, so that you can make this world something which is worthy of life.” Unless and until you adjust yourself to live according to these noble principles, you cannot expect happiness and peace in this world. You cannot expect this happiness and peace from heaven simply by praying.

If you act according to moral principles by upholding human dignity, you can create your own heaven right here in this world. You can also create the hell-fire on this earth itself if you abuse valuable human life. By not knowing how to live according to this universal cosmic law, we often stumble. If each man tries to lead a harmless and respectable life, people can enjoy real heavenly bliss better than the kind that some people hope to gain after death.

It is superfluous to create a heaven elsewhere to

reward virtue, or a hell to punish vice; virtue and evil have inevitable reactions in this world itself regardless of religious faith. Compassion for all creatures is the only way to create heaven. We can have this irresistible luminous ideal for the good of society and country by breathing tolerance and sympathy for others' progress and happiness. We have come this far as a human race because illustrious individuals have shown us the way. By helping others morally, you help yourself and by helping yourself morally, you help others.

Happy Married Life

In a true marriage, man and woman think more of the partnership than they do of themselves. Marriage is a bicycle made for two. A feeling of security and contentment comes from mutual efforts. Impatience and misunderstanding are responsible for most family problems. A wife is not her husband's servant. She deserves respect as an equal. Though a husband has the bread winner's duties, helping out with household chores does not demean a husband's masculinity. At the same

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time, a nagging and grumpy wife is not going to make up for shortages in the home. Neither will her suspicion of her husband help to make a happy marriage. If her husband has shortcomings, only tolerance and kind words will get him to see light. Right understanding and moral conduct are the practical side of wisdom.

Marriage is a blessing but many people turn their married lives into a curse. Poverty is not the main cause of an unhappy married life. Both husband and wife must learn to share the pleasure and pain of everything in their daily lives. Mutual understanding is the secret of a happy family life.

Worry Not

The secret of happy successful living is to do what needs to be done now, and not worry about the past or the future. We cannot reshape the past nor can we anticipate everything in the future. There is but one moment of time over which we have some conscious control and that is the present.

Many people just worry about their future. They have to learn to adjust themselves to the

circumstances. Whatever castles they may build in the air, whatever dreams they may have, they must always remember that they are living in this world of constant friction and change.

“There are no stars which we could trust,
There is no guiding light,
And we know that we must,
BE GOOD, BE JUST, BE RIGHT.”

Pillars of Success

Failures are but the pillars of success. To learn by our failures is to achieve success. Never to have failed is never to have won. Unless we experience failure and its bitterness, we never appreciate the sweetness of victory; it becomes merely a turn of events that is of little or no interest. Failures not only help us to succeed, they make us energetic, enthusiastic, and rich in experience.

“We live and work and dream,
Each has his little scheme,
Sometimes we laugh;
Sometimes we cry,
And thus the days go by.”

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The Real Beauty

Physical ugliness is no handicap to a charming personality. If an ugly person cultivates the virtue of compassionate love, that love will show in so many winning ways — serenity, radiance, kindness and gentleness. That kind of attractiveness will easily compensate for any shortcomings in appearance.

By comparison, a handsome person with airs or conceit, will look so unappealing and repulsive. Inner charm is the real beauty. It has a special quality and attractiveness.

Why is it Difficult to Depart from this World?

For most people, death is an unwelcome event. With so many cravings to be satisfied, the business of living in spite of enormous suffering is never quite finished. People feel more comfortable with the mirage of happiness than with the reality of death. If at all they have to think about it, it only has a slot in the eleventh hour.

Attachments to worldly life create a morbid fear of death. But the truth is that all life is nothing but

suffering. Death is natural and inevitable. It is not half as frightening as the thought of dying itself. The mind has an ability of its own to create and to stretch phantom images of death. The reason is that a mind untrained to see life with all its impermanence and unsatisfactoriness, is likely to cling to illusions just as a drowning man will even cling to a straw.

It creates uneasiness even for those who fervently pray to an imaginary supernatural being for forgiveness and a place in heaven when life seems hopeless. Of course the fear of death is a manifestation of instinctive self-preservation. But there is a way to overcome that fear. Do some selfless service for the welfare of others to gain hope and confidence in the next life. Altruism purges all selfish attachments.

Purity of the mind, not attachment to worldly things, will ensure a happy parting from this world. It is the constant contemplation on death to understand the impermanance of life, and the wisdom to correct the wrong way of living, that take the fear out of death. Strengthen the mind to face facts and

realities of life. Avoid unrealistic and impracticable ambitions. Develop self-confidence. Then you will be more relaxed in overcoming your difficulties in life.

RESPONSIBILITIES

We are all inclined to blame others for our own shortcomings and misfortunes. Have you ever given a thought that you yourself could be responsible for your own problems? Your sorrow has nothing to do with a family curse or the original sin of an ancestor. Neither is it the work of a god or a devil. Your sorrow is of your own making. You are therefore your own jailor and your own liberator. At the same time, you create your own hell and your own heaven. You have the potentiality of becoming a sinner or a saint. No other person can make you a sinner or a saint.

You must learn to shoulder the responsibilities of your own life. You have to learn to admit your own weaknesses without blaming or disturbing others. Remember the old saying:-

The uncultured man always blames others;

the semi-cultured man blames himself and the fully-cultured man blames neither.'

Whenever any problem arises, we as understanding people should try to find out ourselves where the mistake lies without blaming anybody. If each person could try to correct himself, there would not be any trouble or conflict in this world. But people just do not make the effort to improve their understanding by acting unbiasedly. They prefer to find scapegoats. They look outside of themselves for the source of their troubles because they are reluctant to admit their own weaknesses.

Man's mind is given to so much self-deceit that he will try to find some excuse to justify his action so as to create an illusion that he is blameless. The Buddha says:-

'Easily seen are other's faults; hard indeed it is to see one's own faults.' Dh.

To hide their weaknesses with disclaimers for mistakes, many people adopt an aggressive attitude towards others thinking that by so doing,

they can avoid the shameful situation or the cause of the complaint against them. They do not realise that such an attitude would only create more problems for themselves besides giving rise to an unhealthy atmosphere all around.

You must admit when you are wrong. Do not follow the ways of the uncultured who always blame others. The Buddha further says:-

'The fool who does not admit he is a fool, is a real fool. And the fool who admits he is a fool is wise to that extent.' Dh.

You are responsible for the sorrow that comes to you. When you allow even minor incidents to irk and overturn your mind, that in itself will give rise to your sorrow. You must understand that it is not that something is wrong with the world, but that something is wrong with all of us.

Your Responsibilities for Mutual Understanding

Remember that whatever happens, you cannot feel hurt if you know how to maintain a balanced

frame of mind. You are hurt only by the mental attitude that you adopt towards yourself and towards others. If you show a loving attitude towards others, you will likewise receive a loving attitude. If you show hate, you will undoubtedly receive hate in return. An angry man breathes out poison, and he hurts himself more than he would hurt others.

An angry man who shouts at others will be unable to see things in proper perspective as if smoke got into his eyes. Anyone who is wise not to be angered cannot be hurt. Always remember that no one can hurt you unless you pave the way for others to do so. If you follow the Dhamma (righteous way of life), that Dhamma will protect you. The Buddha says:-

'Whoever harms a harmless person, one who is pure and guiltless, upon that very fool the evil recoils like fine dust thrown against the wind.'

Dh.

If you arouse the anger of others you are responsible for the reaction it produces. By show-

ing your aggressive attitude, you will only fulfil the wishes of your enemies.

Blame not others

If you learn to guard your mind properly, external happenings cannot affect you. You must not blame circumstances when things go wrong. You must not think that you are unlucky, that you are the victim of fate, or that somebody has cursed you or had done some 'charm' against you. No matter what reason you give, you must not evade responsibility for your own actions. Try to solve your problems without sulking. Try to work cheerfully even under the most trying circumstances.

Be courageous to face any change if change is natural or necessary; so be brave enough to accept what you cannot avoid. Be wise enough to understand the uncertainty of worldly conditions which affect everybody. Therefore, you must develop courage to face disappointments and problems without feeling frustrated. Difficulties abound in our life. We have to face them bravely. If you know how to overcome them without creating

further problems, you are indeed wise.

Those who try to do some service to others also face problems. They even encounter more blame than those who do not serve others at all. You should not be discouraged; instead, have the understanding to realise that selfless service eventually brings happiness as its own reward. In rendering our service to others, there must be knowledge and understanding. Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher says,

'Love without knowledge and knowledge without love cannot produce a good life.'

You are Responsible for your Inner Peace

You must learn how to protect whatever inner peace and calm you have created within your mind. To preserve the inner peace, you must know when to reduce your superiority complex; you must also know when to ignore your pride, when to subdue your false ego, when to discard your adamance and when to practise patience. You should not allow others to take away your

inner peace. You can preserve your inner peace if you know how to act wisely.

Wisdom comes through understanding. '*Man is not a fallen angel, but a rising animal.*' Use your full effort with conviction to stand by your principles firmly and gently. At the same time, be humble for the sake of peace and tolerance to avoid clashes and violence. By doing so you will never lose anything. Instead, you gain in the end.

How to face Criticism

You must learn how to guard yourself against unjust criticism and how to make sensible use of constructive criticism. You must always look objectively at criticism. If the criticism levelled at you is unjust, ill-founded, given with a bad intention, you should not cowardly surrender your dignity. If you know that there is no conscious guilt in you, your attitude is correct and appreciated by wise people, then you need not worry about ill-founded criticism. Your understanding of both constructive and destructive criticism is

important for you to adjust your way of life to live in any society. The Buddha says:-

'There is no one who is not blamed in this world.'
Dh.

Expect Nothing and Nothing will Disappoint You

You can avoid disappointments by not having any expectations for your service. If you expect nothing, then nothing can disappoint you. Do something for the benefit of others to relieve suffering. If you can do that without expecting any kind of reward, then you can have no cause for disappointment. You can be a contented man! The happiness that appears in your mind for the good that you have done, is itself a big reward. That happiness creates immense satisfaction in your life. By expecting reward, you not only miss your happiness, but very often you will even experience bitter disappointment.

Perhaps, you may be a person who is good by nature and so you do not harm others. But never-

theless you get blamed despite having done good. Then you might ask, 'If good begets good and bad begets bad, why should I have to suffer when I am completely innocent? Why should I have to undergo so many difficulties? Why should I be troubled with so many disturbances? Why should I get blamed by others despite my good work?'

The simple answer is that when you do some good deeds you may unwittingly be going against many evil forces at work in this universe. Those evil forces naturally interrupt good deeds. If not, it could be that you are facing the evil effects of some past evil deed (*kamma*) that is ripening at the present moment. By continuing your good work with sound understanding, you will eventually be free from such troubles. Since you are the one who initially created the disappointments, it is reasonable that only you can overcome them — by realising the true situation of our worldly life.

"By protecting others, you protect yourself. By protecting yourself, you protect others."

Many of the worldly conditions are beyond our control. Unexpected changes, diverse influences and uncertainties do occur to disappoint us. That is why it is sometimes difficult to do good in such changing circumstances. If people heed this advice of the Buddha, everybody could contribute something for their mutual protection.

Gratitude is a rare Virtue

The Buddha considered gratitude to be a great virtue. Yes, it is true that this virtue is rare in any society. You cannot always expect other people to be grateful to you for what you have done.

People are inclined to be forgetful especially when it comes to remembering past favours. If people fail to show gratitude, you have to learn to accept them as such — only then can you avoid disappointment. You can be happy regardless of whether people are grateful for your kindness and help; you need only think and feel satisfied that you have done your noble duty as a human being to your fellow men.

Compare not with Others

You can rid yourself of unnecessary worry and trouble simply by not comparing yourself with others. As long as you regard others as your 'equal', 'superior' or 'inferior', you will have intolerance and restlessness. If you do not adopt such an attitude, there is nothing for you to worry about. If you think you are higher than others, you may become proud. If you think you are second to none, others may descend on you. If you think you are inferior, you may lose your own self-confidence.

For most people, it is very difficult to subdue their pride. It is advisable to learn how to reduce one's pride. If you are able to sacrifice your pride, then you can find your inner peace. You can harmonise yourself with others so as to experience peace and happiness. Which is more important — to maintain your pride or peace of mind?

Try to realise that equality, inferiority, and superiority are all changing relative states: you may be poor now but at another point of time you may be rich. Today you may be ignorant, later

however you can become wise. Today you may be sick and unhappy but given time you will probably be healthy again. However, there are many intangible human qualities which are regarded as mankind's heritage — human rights, human dignity, human status etc. Others have no right to deprive you of them.

'If you are good to yourself, you are good to others. If you are good to others, you are good to yourself.'

How to handle Trouble-makers

You have to realise that you might have contributed something, either intentionally or unintentionally, for the troubles and problems that now befall you. It is also important for you to know what you must do to overcome your problems that have come to you through various sources. If your understanding is deep enough to sublimate your responsibility for having caused the existing problem, you will certainly get the idea of how best to get rid of them.

Then you will know how to handle trouble-makers and your opponents. Those who oppose you also have a human heart. Therefore it is not very difficult to accommodate them; develop their friendship instead of isolating them. If you are strong enough to resist their wrong attitude, then there is no reason to avoid associating with them. Through your association with such people, you can influence them for their own betterment. Remember that it is your own understanding that protects you from your enemies and allows you to guide them to become good.

If a man does something wrong to you through his ignorance or misunderstanding, that is the most opportune time for you to show your wisdom, your education and religious understanding. What is the use of all your education and your religious knowledge if you have not learned how to behave yourself as a real gentleman particularly at a time of trial? When others do wrong to you, you must regard their action as an opportunity for you to develop your patience and sympathy.

Patience is one of the prime qualities which everyone must cultivate. The more you practise such a virtue, the more you will be able to maintain your dignity. You must know how to make good use of your knowledge and principles to deal with people who are hostile to you. Sooner or later, they will realise their folly and change their hostile attitude. Sometimes, people try to take advantage of your tolerance and patience as signs of weakness. That is the time for you to act wisely without becoming a victim to such cunning people. *'Virtues must be practised wisely.'*

Kindness, honesty and patience are fertile grounds for cunning people to be mean on their intended victims possessing such generous qualities.

Forgive and Forget

To take revenge on trouble-makers is only to create more problems and disturbances. You must realise that negative feelings and hostile actions could only bring harm and suffering to both you

and the trouble-maker. In order to take retaliatory action, you have to harbour intense hatred in your heart. This hatred is like a poison. Since the poison is initially in you, surely it will harm you before it can harm anyone else. Before you can throw a blazing iron at another, you get burned first. Your action merely goes to show that there is no basic difference between you and your opponent.

By hating others, you only give them power over you. You do not solve your problem. If you become angry with a person who simply smiles back at you, then you will feel defeated and miserable. Since he did not co-operate with you to fulfil your wish, it is he who is victorious. The Buddha teaches us how to live happily when we are faced with disturbances. *'Ah happily do we live without hate amongst the hateful. Amidst hateful men, we live without hate.'* Dh.

We can live happily without fanning the fires of hatred. Perhaps you may not be strong enough to extend compassionate love to your enemies; but for the sake of your own health and happiness

and that of everybody else, you must at least learn how to forgive and forget.

By not hating or crushing your trouble-maker, you act like a gentleman. To act in this manner, you must understand that the other person has been misled by anger, jealousy and ignorance. He is therefore no different from all other human beings who have also at one time or another been misled by the same negative states of mind. The Buddha says:-

'Evil-doers are not wicked by nature. They do evil because they are ignorant.' Therefore they need guidance.

We should not curse them. It is not justifiable for us to say that they should be condemned to everlasting suffering as it is still not too late to correct them. We should try to explain to them in a very convincing way that they are in fact in the wrong. With this understanding, you can treat the evil-doer as you would a patient who is suffering from a sickness and in need of treatment. When the sickness is cured the ex-patient and everyone

else will be well and happy. The ignorant must be guided by the wise.

'Good life is inspired by love and guided by knowledge.'

If a man does something wrong to you out of ignorance or misunderstanding, then that is the time to radiate your compassionate love towards the evil-doer. One day, he will realise his folly and relent on his evil habits. So it is better to give him a chance to be good. Repentance of his past misdeeds will change him into a better person and in the end he will truly appreciate your kind thoughts. The most compassionate Buddha's advice is:

'Hatred does not cease by hatred; by love alone it ceases. This is an eternal law.'

If you can radiate compassionate love, no harm will come to you. This will help you to achieve both physical and mental health. Life has its own rhythm. When you lose on the swing, you gain on the roundabout. Those who do not understand this principle often get into trouble and face difficulties in life.

If a man does something wrong to you again and again, you must act wisely in correcting him each time he makes the mistake. Although it is not so easy to do that, you should nevertheless try your best to follow the example set by the Buddha. Then you will come to know that it is after all not impossible. The attitude of the Buddha in such a situation could be summarised thus:-

'The more evil that comes to me, the more good will radiate from me.'

Some people think that it is not practicable to return good for evil. Try it and see for yourself. If you find it too difficult to return good for evil, then you can still do a great service to yourself and to others by not returning evil for evil.

'Sympathetic consideration is needed for less-understanding people who make mistakes.'

We are all Human

All human beings have weaknesses and are therefore prone to making mistakes. All human beings have desire, anger and ignorance. These weak-

nesses prevail in all of us in varying degrees. Unless you are perfect or an Arahant, you are no exception. The nature of the human mind shows itself in the following saying:-

'Man is not satisfied with his life and never finds the purpose of life even after gaining the whole world.'

Let us take a closer look at a man who is enveloped in ignorance. His mind is clouded by disturbances, confusion and darkness. Out of ignorance, man creates misfortunes and he shares this with his fellow men. Most of the worry and misery that come to man are due to changing worldly conditions and man's own craving for worldly pleasures which to his selfish mind should continue forever. Disappointment and unfulfilled desires which arise from unexpected changes create worry. Therefore you are responsible for your worry.

Nobody is perfect in this world; everybody is liable some time to commit certain mistakes or evil actions. So how can you think that you are free from mistakes or evil? Ignorance is the main

cause for nurturing the impulse of craving which in turn generates worry.

'Fear and worry disappear when ignorance is dispelled by knowledge.'

If you can understand the weaknesses present in a man's mind in this way, then there should be no reason for you to grumble over your problems. You will have the courage to face them. Man's mind is responsible for both his happiness and unhappiness.

'Nothing happens to man that is not contained within man.'

—C. Jung, well known psychologist

Parental Responsibility

You are responsible for the well-being and upbringing of your children. If the child grows up to be a strong, healthy and useful citizen, it is the result of your efforts. If the child grows up to be a delinquent, it is you who must bear the responsibility. Do not blame others. As parents, it is your bounden duty to guide your child on a proper path. Although there are a few incorrigible cases

of juvenile delinquency, nevertheless as parents, you are responsible for the behaviour of your children.

A child at its most impressionable age, needs the love, care, affection and attention of the parents. Without parental love and guidance, the child will be emotionally handicapped and will find the world a bewildering place to live in. Showering parental love does not mean pandering to all the demands of the child, reasonable or otherwise. Too much pampering would in fact spoil the child. The mother in bestowing her love and care, should also be strict and firm but not harsh, in handling the tantrums of a child. Show your love with a disciplined hand — the child will understand.

Unfortunately, all too often parental love in our present day society is sadly lacking. The rush for material advancement, and the rising aspiration for equality of the sexes, have resulted in many mothers joining their husbands in the rat race. Mothers struggle to maintain their family image or status symbol by working in offices and

shops, rather than being at home tendering to the needs of their off-spring.

Children who are left to the care of relatives or paid servants, as well as 'latch key' children who are left to their own devices at home, are often deprived of motherly love and care. The mother, feeling guilty about her lack of attention, would try to placate the child by giving in to all sorts of demands of the child. Such action only spoils the child.

Providing the child with sophisticated modern toys that are detrimental to character formation such as tanks, machine guns, pistols, swords and the like are psychologically unwholesome. The child is unwittingly being taught to condone destruction instead of being taught to be kind, compassionate and helpful. Such a child will develop brutal tendencies as they grow up. Giving a child such toys is no substitute for a mother's love and affection.

Parents are often placed in a dilemma. Rushing home from a hard day's work the weary

parents have family chores waiting upon them. When the day's work is done, it would be time for dinner followed by T.V., and whatever time there is left, is hardly enough to attend to a child's rightful dues of parental love and affection.

With the call of women's liberation, many women seem to think that the solution is to compete with men outside the home. Such women should consider very carefully whether to bear children. It is irresponsible for a mother to bring a life into this world and then 'abandon' it. You are responsible for what you create.

A child has a right to be satisfied materially, but more importantly spiritually and psychologically. The provision of material comfort is secondary compared to the provision of parental love and attention. We know of many people from poor homes who have with their meagre income, brought up children well with plenty of love. Conversely, many rich people have provided every material comfort for their children, but being deprived of parental love, these children have grown up to become psychologically and morally handicapped.

Some women may feel that advising them to concentrate on the upbringing of the family is something degrading and reflects the thinking of the old and the conservative. It is true that in the past women have been treated very badly, but this was due more to ignorance on the part of men than to an inherent weakness in women. The Sanskrit word for a housewife is '*Gruhini*' which literally means '*leader of the house*,' Certainly it does not imply that a woman is inferior. Rather it means a division of responsibility for the male and the female.

In certain countries, many husbands hand over their pay packet to their wives who handle domestic affairs. This leaves the man free to concentrate on what he can do best. Since each partner knows clearly what his or her responsibilities are, there is no conflict between them. The atmosphere at home is happy and peaceful where their children can grow up well.

Of course, the husband must see to it that his partner is well cared for, that she is consulted on

every family decision, that there is enough freedom for her to develop her own personality and that she has her own free time to pursue her personal interests. In this sense, husband and wife are equally responsible for the welfare of their family. They are not in competition with each other.

A mother should consider carefully whether she should continue as a working mother with all the attendant pitfalls or as a housewife giving all her due affection and care to her growing child. Strangely, some modern mothers, particularly in certain countries with military regimes facing a shortage of manpower, are being trained to handle guns or other deadly weapons when they should be cuddling their children and training them to be good or law-abiding citizens.

The modern attitude of working mothers towards their children tends to erode the time-honoured filial piety which children are expected to uphold. The replacement of breast-feeding by bottle feeding is yet another cause. Hitherto, when mothers used to breast-feed and cuddle

babies in their arms, the tender affection between mother and child becomes much greater. A breast feeding mother, through her maternal instinct, often experiences a tremendous satisfaction from knowing she is providing the baby, as nature has intended, with something of her very own which no one else can give. The influence a mother has on the child thus grows and becomes much more pronounced. Under such circumstances, filial piety, family cohesion and obedience are invariably present.

These traditional traits are for the good and the well-being of children. It is up to the parents, especially the mother to provide them with love, care and affection as their rightful dues. The mother is responsible for the child being good or wayward. The mother can thus reduce juvenile delinquency! At the highest level of thinking, you can see things as they are, not as you are. Then you know that you are responsible for everything.

'Those who lead their lives by going against nature, must face the consequences either physically or mentally.'

How to reduce your Mental Agony

Whenever certain difficulties and problems arise, make up your mind to reduce your mental agony. First, you must try to understand the nature of the world where you live. You can never expect everything in this world to be perfect and to run smoothly. The world situation may not always be in your favour. There could be no world and no life without problems. Natural forces like sunlight, rain, wind and moonlight are favourable and useful to many, yet at times they could be a nuisance to many others. There is in fact nothing perfectly bad or perfectly good in this world because the very things that are welcomed by one group could be hated by another group. Therefore, we define good and bad according to our needs. Things are neither good nor bad by nature. According to Buddhism, the world exist on conflict to which you become part of.

If you have strong selfish cravings for existence and the senses, you will have to pay the price — the mental agony of having to survive with a topsy-turvy view of the world. Wishful

thinking, yearnings for eternity and clinging to feelings such as the elusive 'I' or 'me' only warp the mind and its sense of time. Unfulfilled desires yield their crop of quarrels, friction, communication failures, fear, worry, loneliness and anxiety. There are no free rides.

If you are desirous of eradicating the mental agony within you, you have to subdue selfish cravings. Life's journey has a T-junction. Either you take the right path and develop your spirituality to unwind the tensions of worldly life or you continue to indulge in sensual pleasures with their many attendant confrontations.

One way to relieve yourself of your occasional mental agony is to understand the degree of your own sufferings and difficulties compared with those experienced by others. When you are unhappy, you often feel that the world is against you. You think that everything around you is about to collapse. You feel that the end of the road is near. However, if you take a mental note of things around you and count your blessings,

surprisingly, you will find that you are indeed much better off than many other people.

You might have probably heard the saying, 'I complained I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.' In short, you have been unduly exaggerating your own difficulties and problems. Others are in fact worse off, and yet they do not worry themselves unduly. Problems are there. You should try to solve them instead of worrying and creating mental anguish within you. The Chinese have a practical saying about solving problems:-

'If you have a big problem, try to reduce it to a small problem. If you have a small problem, try to reduce it to no problem.'

Another way to reduce your problems is to recapitulate what you have gone through before, under similar or even worse circumstances; and how you have, through your own patience, initiative and effort, been able to surmount your then seemingly insurmountable difficulties. By doing so, you will not permit your existing problems to 'drown you'. On the contrary, by seeing life in a

new perspective you will be able to solve whatever problems that you may now face.

You should realise that you have gone through much worse situations before and that you are prepared to face them squarely, come what may. With this frame of mind, you will soon regain your self-confidence and be in a better position to solve whatever problems that will be in store for you.

If you are facing a problem, there must surely be a remedy to overcome it. So why worry? On the other hand, even if there is no solution for your problem, again why worry because your worry cannot contribute anything to settle your problem.

All are not Equally Good

Occasionally, there are complaints from people who have never caused or given any trouble to other people and yet they become innocent victims of the wiles and intrigues of others. They feel frustrated despite the good lives they have lived.

They feel they have been harmed through no fault of their own. Under such circumstances, the innocent victim must realise that the world is made up of all sorts of people — the good and the not so good, the bad and the not so bad, with all the unusual characters that go to make up this world of ours. The innocent victim may console himself that he belongs to the good category whereas the disturber of the peace belongs to the bad, and that on certain occasions, he will still have to bear patiently the misdeeds of those belonging to the bad.

We take for instance the case of a '*good and careful driver*' and a '*bad and reckless driver*'. The good and careful driver took every precaution to drive carefully but nevertheless he met with an accident, through no fault of his own — the fault being that of a bad and reckless driver. Thus as we can see the good may have to suffer, despite their goodness, because there are bad and reckless people around us. The world is neither good nor bad. It produces criminals as well as saints, fools and enlightened ones. Out of the

same clay, beautiful and ugly, useful and even useless things can be made. The quality of good pottery depends on the potter and not on the clay. The potter is in fact yourself. The moulding of your happiness or unhappiness is in your hands.

You gain what you seek

If you try your level best to overcome your difficulties by practising the advice given in this booklet, you will definitely find peace, happiness and harmony which you are seeking. Follow principles which have been tested and proven as outlined in this booklet for your protection.

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How to Practise Buddhism

Buddhism which had existed in Peninsular Malaysia up to the 14th Century A.D. was influenced by Indian tradition and culture, as evidenced from important archaeological finds in the northern part of the country in what is now the Kedah/Province Wellesley region. Among the earliest known artifacts discovered was a Buddha image, a product of India's Gupta age, dating back to the 5th Century AD as well as the 5th Century Buddha-Gupta '*Mahanavika*' inscription, now in the Calcutta Museum, a replica of which is at the National Museum, Kuala Lumpur. The country came under Islamic influence during the 15th Century but before the advent of Islam into the country, Siamese or Thai Buddhist influence was prevalent particularly in the northern states.

However, from the early 19th Century up to early 20th Century when development projects began in the Malay States under the rule of the British there was a massive influx of immigrants from neighbouring countries. Different ethnic groups who migrated into this country brought with them their own cultures which, in the course of time, have developed rather independently and as a result have assumed a distinctive character of their own. Admittedly, Buddhism as practised in this country has taken on many forms each depending on whether the adherents are descendants of the

original settlers who came from China, Thailand, Burma or Sri Lanka. However, there are also many Malaysians who simply call themselves 'Buddhists' and practise some form of rituals which they learnt from their forefathers in the name of this religion. The original migrants who came to this country were for the most part uneducated adventurers. They came only in search of material wealth and certainly not as Buddhist missionaries. Although they respected education they themselves were not very well versed in the basic teachings of Buddhism nor in its correct practice. What these early immigrants had handed down to their descendants is therefore not a deeply understood form of Buddhism but a few rituals which they themselves had picked up before they left their homelands. In fact, certain practices which their descendants now carry out in this country are no longer practised even in their motherland today. So it could be said truthfully that a large proportion of Malaysians today are not aware of the significance of what they practise, whether it be Buddhism or some other forms of syncretic traditional and religious rituals which they conscientiously carry on out of respect for their ancestors.

Today we have in our midst Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists who follow Chinese, Thai, Burmese, Sri Lankan, Tibetan, Japanese and Indian traditions. There are even some who have adopted 'Western Buddhism'. Some of their beliefs and practices have been mixed up through the inclusion of various other beliefs and practices which are quite alien

to the spirit of the original Teachings but which have nevertheless been accepted for the sake of tolerance. As a result there has arisen some confusion among concerned Buddhists as to which is the correct method to follow in the practice of Buddhism. Some claim that what they alone preach is right and that everyone else is wrong. It would appear that Buddhists are at the crossroads today and are much in need of guidance to 'Walk the Buddha Way'. Change is a natural phenomenon. The tolerance in Buddhism has given rise to many traditional practices and we have to accept that fact. The Buddha in fact did not introduce the rituals and ceremonies which we are conducting today, nor did he for that matter encourage people to follow some age-old Indian traditions that were prevalent in India during his time. He was concerned only with preaching the Dharma - the righteous way of life or the facts of life. After his passing away, his followers in different countries and at different times adopted their own local traditions and cultures into the religion as Buddhism grew in popularity and developed in those countries. Naturally, we should not take all these traditional practices as being the Dharma originally taught by the Buddha. What we only need to know is the truth as taught by the Buddha. Through our sustained effort to spread the true teachings, we will help eradicate or at least reduce the misguided rituals that are being carried out now in the name of Buddhism. To do this we must study the original teachings and decide for ourselves as to what is right or wrong.

Significance of The Dharma

The Dharma is a very significant word used by the Buddha in his religious discourses. From the Buddhist point of view 'religion' is a very different concept from that defined by other religious groups. The Dharma is the path or method taught by the Buddha for us to follow in order to maintain our human dignity and intelligence to lead a noble or righteous way of life. We are free to interpret the Dharma according to our own understanding; there are no obligatory rituals which we must practise in order to call ourselves Buddhists. Religion on the other hand implies dependence on an external source for spiritual development, salvation through prayer, strictly defined rituals and so on.

Buddhism teaches us that there are four unfortunate states of existence which result from the way living beings have conducted themselves in their past lives. Those who violate the Dharma or universal law will be reborn in one of those unfortunate states namely, hell, the animal kingdom, the spirit world and the ghost world. Such states are not located in any particular geographical area but exist anywhere in the universe which can be inhabited by living beings. Those who uphold the Dharma will never be reborn in any of these unfortunate states. When we live according to the principles of the Dharma, we are in fact living as 'good Buddhists practising Buddhism'. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we should know our own

circumstances and live in accordance with the Dharma as taught by the Buddha. To be a Buddhist one must have full confidence in the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha (Triple Gem) and we must also have an understanding of the significance of the Triple Gem. Only then could blessing, protection and guidance be gained. Without such knowledge and understanding, whatever a person does in the name of Buddhism will not bring him the desired results.

We are subject to being born over and over again according to the karma we create. You may want to know what karma is. It can be explained in the simplest language - do good and good will come to you now and hereafter; do bad and bad will come to you now and hereafter, within the cycle of birth and death. The condition of this world is that we must constantly strive for our survival. Because we believe in a false 'ego' or 'self', we tend to harbour within ourselves negative qualities like anger, jealousy, greed and enmity. We believe that our survival can only be assured if we destroy everyone else whom we perceive as a source of danger to us - thus we believe in the 'survival of the fittest'. We worry and cry unnecessarily for many desired but unattainable things. We also tend to live to enjoy life by lying, swindling or cheating our fellow human beings and by disturbing the peace of others. We thus commit more evil than good deeds. Our belief in a permanent self leads us to seek self protection at the expense of others. That is why we are very prone to do evil deeds. This will result in our continued exis-

tence in different forms determined by our respective good or bad deeds. The Dharma as taught by the Buddha guides us to avoid evil deeds and to maintain our fortunate human existence with which we have been blessed. This means our rebirth can take place in any one of the fortunate states such as the realms of human beings or devas. By understanding Universal Law, Natural Phenomena or Dharma, we have to cultivate human values and to harmonise ourselves with other living beings. Living in this way, we will become cultured and caring persons. We also can be assured that after our deaths we will be able to avoid being reborn into any of the unfortunate states.

In Buddhism the ultimate aim is not merely to be born in a place to gain worldly pleasure. As long as we continue to do good, we will be born in happy planes of existence, but even these states are not satisfactory. They are to be regarded as being only temporary; for when the store of good karma we have built up becomes exhausted we will die and be reborn according to whatever residual karma is left. So good Buddhists are not merely satisfied with worldly life; they strive to purify the mind and develop wisdom (*panna*). Only in this way will we finally be able to attain Nirvana - where there is no more rebirth, no more karma and no more unsatisfactoriness. By cultivating a spiritual way of life we will be able to see an end to all our physical and mental suffering. This should be our ultimate aim or final goal in life. Today, we are struggling to escape from our suffering. Since we are doing it in a wrong way, very few

can understand that it is a losing battle. If we really want to get rid of our suffering forever, then we will have to discover the correct method: the method which the Buddha clearly defined in the Dharma.

Foundations of Buddhism

(Sila, Samadhi, Panna)

The Dharma taught by the Buddha shows us the correct path. This path or method is classified into three stages. They are *Sila* (Morality), *Samadhi* (Mental culture or stillness) and *Panna* (Wisdom). They are the three basic principles or three pillars of Buddhism, which can be developed over many lifetimes with diligence, and which will lead us to ultimate peace. Let us first speak of *sila* or moral development through discipline. We must learn how to live as harmless and gentle human beings. In simple language we must know how to live without disturbing the peace and goodwill of others. If we are able to do this it will indeed be a great achievement. Discipline, good conduct, precepts and morals are all synonymous with this word '*sila*'. This is the foundation on which to start a religious way of life. If a house is built without laying a proper foundation, it will be very unstable. Modern man has learnt the hard way how important it is to live in '*sila*'. It means respecting the right of others to exist. If we believe that the world was created solely for our own benefit, then we will take from it whatever we want indiscriminately; without caring about what happens

to other living beings and the environment like plants, rivers, the atmosphere and so on. In the end, as a result of major ecological imbalances of nature created by us in our modern way of life, we will be destroying ourselves. A good Buddhist on the other hand has a deep respect and concern for the well being of every other being. This is *sila*. But *sila* alone is not enough as we also need to develop *Samadhi* and *Panna* which will be explained in the paragraphs that follow.

The Mind

After having cultivated our moral conduct, we have to concentrate on training our mind. Humans are the only living beings in this universe capable of cultivating their minds up to the maximum limit to attain enlightenment or the ultimate wisdom. It is extremely difficult for living beings other than humans to develop their minds up to that level. That is why a person who aspires to become a Buddha must be a human being. Even the devas cannot become Buddhas without first becoming humans. The reason is that they can only passively enjoy their past good Karma - only human beings can actively CREATE new, fresh good Karma and make the effort to totally purify the mind through meditation.

As human beings we have great latent potential in our minds, but such potential is eclipsed by our anger, delusion, ignorance, craving, selfishness and many other mental defilements. We must realise that

with the passing of every second we are wasting and misusing our mental energy on unnecessary pursuits. We just do not know how to harness our vast mental energy for a useful and good purpose. The Buddha showed us how to harness that vast storehouse of mental energy and use it for our liberation from misery. In his final birth Sakyamuni sacrificed his life and kingdom and underwent severe suffering until he finally liberated the mind and gained supreme enlightenment. He has assured us that with mental development and purity, we too can follow his footsteps and experience the ultimate happiness.

Do you know the amount of mental energy we are using through our five senses and imagery? So much mental energy is needlessly wasted through our six channels in useless imagination, temptations and frustration. The Buddha has introduced one proven method for us to harness this vast mental energy and it is called 'Meditation'. Meditation means harnessing our mental energy through concentration and from there we go on training and taming the mind. It is not possible to cultivate the mind simply by faithfully praying and worshipping any god, or by performing various rituals and ceremonies. We can never hope to gain knowledge, wisdom, purity or enlightenment through performing ritualistic practices or prayers. The Buddha says in the '*Sati Patthana Sutta*' that meditation is the *only* path or *only* method that we can use to gain purity and enlightenment. Here we must not confuse Buddhism and Meditation. Buddhism is the total practice of

the Teaching of the Buddha manifested through various popular cultures; whilst Meditation is the specific method developed to rid the mind of impurities. Once a person has practised discipline through *Sila* and achieved control of the body, then the mind is ready to be developed - through Meditation. It is the only way for our FINAL release from this existence. Here the Buddha is talking about concentration for mental training and purity for gaining final salvation. Since our minds are polluted, this method helps us to rid ourselves of our worries, miseries and mental disturbances. You may go here and there worshipping various gods and goddesses with the hope of getting rid of your worries and problems. But unless and until you train your own mind to develop a true understanding of the nature of existence, as well as realising who you really are, you can never gain real relief from such miseries and worries. Meditation is the way whereby we can attain the four levels of sainthood namely, *Sotapanna*, *Sakadagami*, *Anagami* and *Arahat* which lead one to experience Nibbanic bliss. Only when we understand the Dharma taught by the Buddha and realise what we are in fact doing in the name of Buddhism, can we differentiate between actions which fail to lead us to real happiness and those which we call 'skilful action', which positively help liberate us from misery and ignorance.

Human Behaviour

Another important thing to remember is the understanding of our own character. We should know that the types of behaviour which we had developed during our previous births do influence the moulding of our habits within this lifetime. That is why we all have different individual characteristics and attitudes. Even children from the same parents each have different mentalities, characteristics, inclinations and behaviour. These could be regarded as manifestations of their particular mental habits developed over a series of different lifetimes. Whilst one child may be criminal-minded, the second could be very pious and religious, the third very intelligent, the fourth stupid, the fifth very honest, the sixth very cunning and so on. These are the manifestations of their own mental habits. In our storehouse of consciousness, we too maintain such mental habits as we pass from one life to another. Consciousness is a very dynamic mental faculty. All the five senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching) bring objects from the outside to influence the mind and create mental objects. The other three mental faculties relating to sensation, recollection and good or evil mental habits also constitute consciousness. When we die, our consciousness leaves the body and joins with four elements and cosmic energies, to create another existence. These four elements are : solidity, fluidity, heat and motion. This is how beings appear and reappear again and again. Now, in order to ensure that we

have desirable mental attitudes in the future we must make an earnest endeavour to develop good mental attitudes now, in our present life. Once the process of mental purification is begun and carefully nurtured it can be carried on into future lives for further development. So the mental training for gaining mental purity is the second stage necessary for leading a pure religious way of life as a Buddhist. This is called *SAMADHI*.

Different Characters

Buddhism makes us understand our own character. Hence, if we can understand our own mind and recognise our own weaknesses then we can easily train it. This is the only way to gain peace and happiness. The Buddha taught us how to analyse our mind so that we can understand where our defilements lie and why disturbances arise to pollute the mind. The Buddha was such a practical teacher that he just did not stop there. He went on to the next stage and showed us how to change that mental attitude. If our minds are conditioned to be hot-tempered, selfish, greedy, jealous and cruel the Buddha taught us different methods to train such minds. He said that 'mind is the forerunner of all mental states'. Whatever we do, it all begins in the mind. This reminds us of the well known principle embodied in the preamble to the UNESCO Charter on Human Rights which states: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defen-

ces of peace can be constructed.' So if we stop evil thoughts from arising in the mind we will be capable of only doing good. This is the way to practise Buddhism. But many people have generally tended to ignore all the important aspects of the Buddha's teaching and have instead concentrated more on the ritualistic aspects, thereby looking for an easy way out of suffering. In Buddhism we cannot gain salvation by simply pleasing or praising the gods without training the mind.

The third and last stage is *Panna* which means Supreme Wisdom. Wisdom here is not simply academic or scientific knowledge. We can gather vast book knowledge through learning but that in itself does not bring wisdom. Wisdom cannot appear in the mind as long as selfishness, hatred and delusion predominate. It is only when these mental hindrances are completely erased from the mind and replaced with mental development that real wisdom will appear. Wisdom is like brightness. When brightness appears darkness disappears; one displaces the other. Occasionally, the evil forces which are latent in our mind do flare up according to the intensity of our temptation and irritation at any given moment. When anger flares up, we show our ugly face. Hidden evil forces in the mind can thus emerge to change and cloud our mental attitude. Even a man who has lived a religious life for a long period can still get into that horrible state of mind, if the mind has not been trained properly and if the impure states have not been completely uprooted.

This is what the Buddha taught and this is what

we have to do in order to lead a Buddhist way of life. First we have to cultivate our moral background, then try to understand the nature of our mind and thereafter train it so that we can try to discover a remedy to cleanse the mental impurities. After eradicating our mental defilements we will be able to cultivate proper understanding. In the end we gain Wisdom and liberation from our physical and mental suffering - the ultimate goal aspired by every good Buddhist.

Religions can be divided into two groups

We can classify all existing religions into two groups: Religions which are based entirely on faith, and religions based on mental purity rather than faith. Those who emphasise faith more than purity believe that they can gain their final salvation through their ardent faith alone. To them mental purity is not an important aspect. That is why they say that no one can gain salvation by observing morals and precepts without also developing a strong faith in god. Buddhism on the other hand teaches that faith is not the most important aspect but that purity of the mind is. When we have purity in the mind coupled with wisdom, we can never hold wrong ideas as the real truth. Faith alone cannot purify the mind to remove doubts so as to help us understand the truth. People can uphold a wrong belief without analysing it or without having any sense of reasoning because they are afraid that if they do,

they might lose their faith and thus also lose their chance to gain salvation. The Buddha's advice on the other hand is, before accepting any belief as the truth, it is for us to study, investigate, practise and see the results for ourselves in the end. When we come to a conclusion after having made a thorough analytical investigation, we gain confidence in the truth, as we have satisfactorily verified it for ourselves. By realising the truth ourselves, we naturally gain confidence. This is neither mere faith nor belief but realisation. The Buddha's advice is neither to believe nor to reject anything at first hand. As we have human minds to enable us to think soberly, we must therefore give a chance to our minds to think independently and understand things in their correct perspective. We should not think that we just cannot understand. Some people who are very lazy to study a problem in depth, simply do not try to understand things as they really are and so seek the easy way out by just surrendering themselves to what the others say, because they have no self confidence in themselves. A true Buddhist on the other hand has self-respect, knowing fully well that he is responsible for himself, his actions and his salvation. 'No one saves us but ourselves, the Buddhas show us the correct way.'

Three other Simple Methods

(Dana, Sila and Bhavana)

So far we have learned from the preceding paragraphs that to lead a practical Buddhist way of life

we must essentially develop Moral Discipline (*Sila*), Concentration (*Samadhi*) and Wisdom (*Panna*). There are three other simple methods to practise Buddhism. They are: *Dana*, *Sila* and *Bhavana*. *Dana* (generosity) means contributing or sacrificing something for the benefit of others. But this must be done without any ulterior or selfish motive. Then what is the main purpose of giving? The real Buddhist attitude of *Dana* is not the act of giving in the hope of gaining some reward in return, but to reduce selfishness. We commit enormous mistakes and disturb others owing to our own selfishness. So when we contribute something for the benefit of others we actually reduce our own selfish desires and in its place we develop love, kindness and understanding. That is the way to start a Buddhist way of life for our spiritual development.

The second stage is *Sila*. As we all know *Sila* means development of moral conduct which we have already discussed earlier. There are however five important precepts for lay Buddhists to observe with regard to *Sila*. They are abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies and taking intoxicating drinks and drugs. When we observe these noble principles, we not only cultivate our religious way of life but also render a better service to others by allowing them to live peacefully. By leading a pure life according to the noble eightfold path, we become noble ourselves and life becomes more meaningful. Those who are spiritually advanced see no meaning at all in material possessions and worldly powers, so they

renounce the mundane world and observe more precepts in order to gain more peace and happiness.

Many people observe their religious commandments or laws in the firm belief that if they violate any such commandments, a god will punish them. Fear of god or fear of punishment therefore acts as a deterrent and is the main reason which makes them observe religious laws. Thus they 'do good' not because they are themselves intrinsically good, acting from a pure mind, but because they suppress evil thoughts out of fear of punishment. The evil thought is merely suppressed without understanding its source; not entirely eradicated, it lies dormant in the mind. It can therefore manifest itself at any time when the mind is not guarded. If anyone says that he does not like to kill just because of fear of punishment from god, then that will only indicate that he has not cultivated his mind to reduce cruelty and hatred and hence has not developed mercy towards others. Such humane qualities would not have existed had it not been for the perpetual fear of punishment from god. He only maintains fear for his own personal safety with a selfish motive. When Buddhists observe the precept 'not to kill' they are not concerned with any fear of punishment but they consider the danger of cruelty and suffering which they create towards others. By considering the danger of the act of killing they will, in this way, refrain from killing. They then give a chance to their minds to cultivate virtues such as kindness, compassion, sympathy and understanding. They also observe all the other Buddhist

principles in the same manner. With regard to this act of killing, the Buddha says: 'If you cannot understand why killing others is bad, then consider it in this way: When another person comes and tries to kill you, think of how you would feel at that very moment. How you would try to escape and what sort of physical and mental suffering or anguish you would have to experience? This is more than enough for you to understand why it is bad. If you cannot understand why stealing is bad then think of how you would feel should others come and take away your belongings.' This concept is summarised in the Dharmapada like this:-

All tremble at the rod
All fear death
Considering this
One should neither strike
Nor cause to kill

This is a practical approach to daily living and should not be regarded as a theory nor even as a commandment coming from an authority or a supreme being, who is both executioner and rewarder. By using our human knowledge we should understand the bad effects of evil deeds. Some people might say that they are forbidden to do certain things just because their religion says so. But that is not the way for a mature person to follow as to what to do and what not to do. When we uphold all our precepts, we should not think that we are observing them only for our own benefit. When you stop killing and disturbing people, they can expect to live peacefully because you do not create fear

in their minds. What a wonderful contribution that would be to others. If you do not rob, lie and swindle others they can have security, happiness and so live peacefully. If everyone in this country could follow these noble principles of moral conduct, how happy we will all be!

Why Religion is Needed

Human beings by nature are sometimes not reliable and so they do violate principles. That is why a religion is needed to train them. In the past we were scared of natural phenomena like lightning and thunder, wild animals, ghosts and devils. Later we realised that many of our past beliefs in ghosts and devils were unfounded and were merely imaginary. Today we can ignore them. What we need to fear however are ruthless human beings who are out to destroy our peace and happiness. It is difficult to reform humans to make them reliable persons. In a way animals could be regarded as more admirable than people. Although animals have no religion, they follow nature. They are only guided by the instinct for survival and never attack others except in self defence or for food. They have no deceit.

It is the human mind that must have a religion to think and understand. Man needs moral standards to reduce selfishness and deceit. Man can turn and twist his mind for his own ends and to his personal advantage. To straighten the crookedness of the human mind,

religion is necessary. Albert Einstein once said, 'atomic energy has shaken and changed the whole world; but even that powerful atomic energy cannot change man's nature'. It is still as crooked, unreliable and dangerous as it has been from earliest times. But religion can change this mind for a better purpose if people really uphold the religious principles.

Here we must define what is meant by religion. For Buddhists, 'religion' means something very different from the normally accepted meaning of the word. Buddhism as a religion envisages the human being as a devout person working in accord with the Teachings of the Buddha towards achieving his own salvation by doing good and purifying the mind. The teaching of the Buddha does not place any reliance on prayer, supplication and ritual. That is why the Buddha had repeatedly advised us to study the nature of the mind. We can thus understand where our weaknesses lie and only then can we find the suitable solution to get rid of our weaknesses to save ourselves. Buddhism teaches Self-Reliance.

Meditation

The last or third stage is *Bhavana* or meditation for the development of the mind. Without *Bhavana* we cannot achieve the aim or the purpose of our life. The purpose of life is to see an end to our suffering. Then, what is meditation? When we develop the mind by eradicating mental impurities we gain purity. We

strive with great effort to reach the peak of perfection. The only way to achieve this final goal is for us to practise meditation as taught by the Buddha. Although we have achieved some progress in modern society and have changed from striving for mere survival to some measure of physical pleasure and comfort, there is however, no real corresponding development in man's mind. People have used their wider knowledge of the physical world only to create more temptation and excitement and they regard such 'discoveries' as development. They organise various activities to cater to our physical needs and advertise them to create temptation. In the past, people did not resort to crass commercialism to influence the mind and to create desire. Now, through the media of television, cinemas, erotic dances, lewd magazines and many other such entertainments, excitement is created. Human passions are aroused to such a degree that immoral practices have become rampant. These do not in any way calm the mind and give peace. But this does not mean that we should condemn everything that pleases the senses. We cannot deny that art and culture do please the senses. They do so in such a way that raises the human spirit and encourages reflection and repose. The purpose of cultural activities such as Folk dancing, Singing, the Theatre and many other kinds of arts are to make man more aware of his existence; they relax and calm the mind without arousing the base passions. It is accepted that human beings do have emotions. They should be catered for by providing suitable and wholesome entertainment without

arousing the wild nature latent in the human mind. In fact if there is nothing to occupy the mind, then that mind can become very violent and intolerant. The saying 'An idle mind is the devil's workshop' is indeed very true. Therefore decent cultural practices should be introduced to calm the mind and provide an understanding of the nature of our existence. It is regrettable to note how the modern consumer society has polluted cultural activities and abused the splendour of our ancient cultural practices.

The Consequences of Modern Forms of Entertainments

How many kinds of immoral practices are there in our so-called modern entertainments? When you enter a place where they perform such entertainments, you can see for yourself how the organisers of such entertainments try to influence your mind. Their main purpose of course is to make easy money. They are not in the least worried about the adverse effects such shows would have on human values, religions and culture. That is why some people say it is difficult to practise Buddhism in the midst of our modern society because Buddhism does not condone nor encourage any kind of entertainment. As pointed out earlier, this is not true at all. Buddhism encourages culture and art, but it does discourage any activity which debases human dignity. In the distant past, when we were living as primitive men we had only a few problems. Such problems

concerned our obtaining of food and shelter and the survival of the community. Even clothing was worn primarily for protection and not to adorn the body. Today we tend to regard those early people as being unfortunate or uncivilised when we compare their standard of living to that of ours. But in our modern society how many millions of problems are there? Most of them have in fact been created by us. Because of the problems of our own making we have no peace, no sleep, no appetite and have difficulty managing our lives amidst global disturbances everywhere. This is the nature of modern society, but in those early days people led a tranquil life. They had time to relax and enough time to take their food. There was no rat-race then.

It might be argued that it is simplistic to say that primitive man was happy while we are not. But the point we are making is that modern civilisation is unnecessarily complicated, creating problems which need not exist at all if we could only learn to reduce our wants and live like our ancestors with few basic needs. Many great men like Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer have proven that even in modern times, the happiest people are those with the fewest needs. According to the Buddha the highest wealth of a man is contentment. Although primitive man had to go out and hunt animals for food, he was however quite contented and satisfied with that way of life, primitive though it might have been. Today we build large and tall buildings to live comfortably but there is no security within. How many iron gates and doors are there all secured

and fitted with electronic burglar alarm systems? Why do we need all these extra gadgets? Is this modern development? Those who live in such lofty houses live in perpetual fear because of insecurity. In the past, however people could sleep peacefully even under trees, in caves or anywhere without having such fear and worry. Sure they had problems too - all human existence for that matter is problematic but modern man has increased and complicated these problems a thousand fold, all unnecessarily, and of his own making.

The Buddha Preached According to His Own Experience

The Buddha introduced a righteous way of life for us to follow after having himself experienced the weaknesses and strengths of human mentality. During the early part of his life as a young man he experienced worldly pleasures just like any other human being. He was a prince, a husband, a father and the son of the ruler of a kingdom. He had a beautiful wife and a loving son. He loved them but he had more compassion towards suffering humanity. His kindness was not limited only to his family but extended to every living being. He had the courage to free himself from his emotional attachment towards them in order to discover the solution for human suffering. He had to renounce the worldly life to gain enlightenment. After gaining his supreme wisdom he returned home and revealed to all what he had realised. He told them that

if they too would like to share this belief, liberation or salvation, he would teach them the method. He also advised people not to believe what he preached just because he was a great man. He further said that, simply by worshipping and praying to him one would not gain salvation.

How to Follow The Buddha

The Buddha advised mankind to follow his teachings and to practise diligently what he preached in order to gain salvation. In fact, we cannot call ourselves followers of the Buddha if we merely follow him blindly by just regarding him as a powerful master. What the Buddha expected of us is to live in accordance with the Dharma. Only then can we truly say to all that we do follow the Buddha. The Buddha once said, 'There may be many disciples who stay with me, following me by holding my hand or clinging to my robes thereby thinking that they are close to me. On the other hand there may be some other disciples who are far away from me and who have not even seen me, but if their minds are pure, even though they are staying far away, they are indeed very close to me. Those who stay with me but exist only with polluted minds, are in fact not at all close to me'. This was the Buddha's attitude. There was a monk who always admired the serenity of the Buddha. One day the Buddha asked the monk what he was looking at. The monk replied that it gave him immense happiness whenever he admired

the complexion and features of the Buddha. Then the Buddha asked: 'What do you hope to gain by watching this dirty physical body? The Buddha is not in the physical body. Only one who understands the Dharma taught by me sees the Buddha. The Buddha can only be seen through the Dharma!'. Many people sit before a Buddha image and pray to it, thinking that the Buddha somehow 'lives' in the statue. But the Buddha images that you normally see are merely the outward artistic expression of great qualities of a holy man. Man being intensely religious, made a tangible symbol to worship to express his devotion to his great Master. This gave rise to the development of Art which brought forth the concept of the Buddha and his teaching of the Cosmic Law from the realm of abstraction to gave it material form resulting in the contemplative Buddha image. By looking at such a Buddha image we could only imagine that the Buddha himself might have looked like this. The Buddha personifies Wisdom, Perfection, Sacredness, Compassion and Serenity. The Buddha image is primarily a symbol, something that fills a place with serenity just as the presence of a holy person spiritually illumines a house. There is no doubt that the serene appearance of the Buddha image calms our mind. But the Buddha that you 'see' through knowledge of the Dharma is in fact the real Vision of the Buddha. When you think of how he preached and what he preached, how he breathed tolerance, dignity, gentleness, compassion or kindness towards every living being; and also think of the nature of his enlightenment

or supreme wisdom, only then, can you see the Buddha as an embodiment of all such great virtues and wisdom. So without knowledge and practice of the Dharma you cannot really 'see' the Buddha.

Gradual Development of The Buddhist Way of Life

(Traditional, cultural, devotional, intellectual and spiritual)

There are five methods in the practice of Buddhism. These methods have been introduced and practised by people in different parts of the world, according to their own way of life, needs and education. They can be categorised into the above mentioned five groups.

Traditions

The traditional aspect of religion was introduced by our ancestors according to their beliefs. Because of ignorance many of their beliefs were based on fear, imagination and suspicion; and verily, had been practised for their own protection and physical well being. However, we should not dismiss all traditions and customs as simply based on superstitious beliefs. Some traditions and customs are indeed meaningful. They have developed to help members of the

community to dispel fear and insecurity, at the same time, to perform activities in an organised manner to maintain humanism. From time immemorial some of these practices have become incorporated with religious practices. Those who are not familiar with the real teachings of the Buddha might get the wrong impression that the traditional practices are in fact the real Buddhist way of life. Traditions and customs differ from country to country and from time to time among different ethnic groups. Therefore we should not think that our own traditions are far superior to those of others. We must understand that Buddhism is not a static or ready made religious concept with dogma handed down by religious authorities. It is a way of life which had evolved according to prevailing times and circumstances. But the absolute Dharma or truth as taught by the Buddha can never change. We must also learn to differentiate between the Absolute Truth as taught by the Buddha and the Relative Truth which is changeable according to circumstances.

The Buddha's attitude towards traditions and customs is such that one should neither accept nor reject them offhand without first having given them due thought and consideration. His advice is not to follow them if they are found to be useless and harmful to any being even though they might be ancient. On the other hand if they are indeed significant and beneficial to all, then by all means follow them. Some of those traditions are important to generate inspiration and devotion to those performing religious ceremonies especially in a

community. Without certain traditional practices, religion itself will be in isolation and personal devotion will weaken. Some people even uphold traditional religious practices and preserve them as their 'heritage' for inspiration to rally round their religion.

Culture

Culture and religion are closely interwoven in any society. Culture is part and parcel of human life. Human values, skill, intelligence and aesthetic beauty can be seen through cultural practices. Culture is the expression of refined and beautified traditions adapted either to influence or to promote fine arts as a means to entertain. Cultural practices inspire the human mind. Human passions can be calmed, gratified and ennobled through cultural practices. The glory of Asia depends a great deal on its culture and in this respect, Buddhist culture has played a prominent role. Culture can also protect and promote a religion. When we introduce religion through our cultural practices, our day-to-day religious activities will be more attractive and we will be able to influence others to follow it as a living religion. We can say that cultural practices that are religious in nature are the stepping stone to understanding the religious way of life. Those who are not religious minded at the beginning will eventually get used to attending and appreciating religious activities. By attending such activities people will gradually get the opportunity to improve their proper religious knowledge and under-

standing. Otherwise they will tend to shun religion altogether. If people are well-educated and have improved their understanding and are personally noble, it is not very important for them to actively participate in traditional or cultural activities to be religious. Religion can contribute a great deal to enrich culture. It may be true to say that in Asian countries generally, the practice of a religion is clearly linked to cultural activities. Dances, songs, art and drama very largely draw their inspiration from religious subjects. Without culture religious activities may turn out to be very dry and uninteresting. At the same time, when we practise Buddhism without disturbing other traditions or the followers of other religions, this form of tolerance and peaceful coexistence along with our respectable behaviour and gentle attitude can also be regarded as a cultural aspect.

Devotion

The devotional aspect is very important in a religion. Whatever we believe in or practise, without devotion, confidence can only be regarded as academic. Since devotion is related to human emotion, proper religious knowledge is essential. Otherwise, the devotion based on beliefs alone can become blind faith. Devotional activities in a religion naturally calm the mind and create inspiration. When the mind is thus inspired, fear, tension, anger and many other mental disturbances will be subdued, or even eradicated. Then such

devotion can be strengthened to further enhance our faith; enabling us to carry out our religious way of life with confidence. Devotional activities fall in the category of *SILA* which we discussed earlier. The proper practice of *SILA* paves the way for mind purification and wisdom which are the higher stages in spiritual development. Mere belief and devotion without understanding can lead one to religious fanaticism.

Paying homage to the Buddha, offering of flowers, etc., Sutra chanting, religious recitals, ceremonies, religious performances, singing of devotional songs and similar practices inspire and calm the mind. Devotees can develop their confidence through such practices. Deeply rooted devotion fosters patience to endure any kind of suffering. Devotion strengthens the mind to face difficulties.

Intellect

The intellectual aspect is yet another method to understand and practise the religion. Having gone through traditional, cultural and devotional practices, many people 'graduate' to the intellectual aspect. This would mean that through intense study and diligent practice, they can gain more knowledge and understanding to clarify their doubts on the significance of religious beliefs and practices, the precise meaning and purpose of life, the nature of worldly conditions and their unsatisfactoriness, as well as the phenomena and

the universal nature of impermanence. Through study, observation and concentration they will be able to gain a clear vision of reality, an understanding of universal phenomena and confidence in religion. The confidence that they do gain through understanding is unshakeable. But there are many who do not take the trouble to gain a clear understanding of the Buddha's teachings. First we must learn. After having learned, we must practise what we have learned; and finally, only after practising can we experience the beneficial results. Anyone can practise this method without having to depend on theories, philosophy and traditional beliefs. We also must not depend on personality cults - in other words depending on other persons for our salvation. Granted some people do gain a good knowledge of the Dharma. Verily, if they do not follow the religious principles to cultivate their moral conduct, they are like a spoon which does not know the taste of soup. Mere book knowledge does not contribute anything for the betterment of their lives. Without mental purity, knowledge alone may in the end become scepticism.

Spirit

The last method is the spiritual aspect and that is to gain purity, wisdom and eternal bliss. In fact, whatever religious knowledge we gain, whatever we practise in the name of religion, we can never gain perfection or liberation without mental purity. It is true

that without eradicating mental impurities, we can do lots of good deeds but that in itself will not be enough.

We also must try to be morally good, otherwise selfishness, greed, jealousy, anger and egoism can still disturb the mind. Since the untrained mind is a very delicate instrument and always in a vulnerable state, any temptation or irritation can easily influence it to commit evil deeds. Spiritual development can only be gained through proper mental training. That is why meditation is the only proven method for mental purity.

The main purpose of practising Buddhism is:

- to gain peace and happiness within this life,**
- to have a contented and fortunate life hereafter and finally,**
- to achieve the ultimate aim of life: everlasting happiness or supreme bliss.**

Several methods have been outlined here to tell you how to practise Buddhism. So, if you really want to see the good results and to know what the Buddha taught, try to study and follow the basic teachings taught by the Buddha, without depending on theories or different schools of Buddhism.

PRACTICAL BUDDHISM

K. Sri Dhammananda

PRACTICAL BUDDHISM

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has intrinsically three types of nature: animal nature, human nature and divine nature. We adopt one of these natures to satisfy our worldly needs and desires.

When our minds are not guided by religious discipline, our 'animal natures' often dominate. Human beings retain some of the animal nature, inherited from their predecessors since the primeval past. Although they may have evolved and changed physically, they still have with them the lower mental processes, habits and patterns of behaviour. Many of these characteristics may not be so obvious when conditions are favourable and the surroundings congenial. However, when situations change, these characteristics flare up like a volcano, as a result of deep-seated emotions and craving.

There is one main characteristic which separates human beings from animals, that is, they have a mind to think and reflect about their existence and the life and phenomena around them. Despite having such a highly developed mind, they are unable to use their minds to the fullest because of delusion. A religion can be used as a means to remove that delusion, subdue the animal nature and cultivate humane qualities consistent with what can justly be regarded as 'human nature'.

A mind expresses its human nature through kindness and compassion, consideration to others, providing services to relieve others of their suffering. When that mind is cultivated beyond humanism and constantly dwells in equanimity and radiates loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy to all beings without distinction, that mind has realised its 'divine nature'.

The divine nature is not cultivated by offering prayers to some supernatural powers, if a person does not spend time cultivating his virtues. From the Buddhist point of view, there is, in fact, no necessity for some external divine inspiration to influence and ennoble the mind. This is something which a person will have to do himself. He ennobles his mind by eliminating negative characteristics such as ignorance, hatred, jealousy, and selfishness, while cultivating positive qualities of friendliness, love and compassion.

Cultivating the mind so that it can be refined to realise its divine nature is a noble task to be undertaken by all. It is our task to use our human nature to remove our animal nature and use religion to cultivate our divine nature. Buddhism takes us one step further in cultivating our virtues. Through the Dhamma, we can transcend our divine nature and achieve one more level, namely, the fourth and most important nature, the 'Enlightened Nature', which is the state of self-awakening and realisation into the nature of life as it really is.

The first step towards transforming ourselves is to understand what Buddhism is: What is it really? What are the aspects in the understanding and practice of Buddhism? What is its doctrinal content? And how can it be adopted and practised in modern society? These are important questions which will be dealt with in this booklet.

WHAT IS BUDDHISM?

Buddhism is based on the Buddha's teaching, the Dhamma, which was given by the Master more than 2500 years ago. Western writers have tried various ways to classify Buddhism in the categories they know best. Some say it is not a religion, but only a philosophy. Others say that Buddhism is not philosophy, but only a moral code. Despite these interpretations, millions acknowledge it as a religious way of life.

Is Buddhism a Religion?

Before answering this question, let us examine the meaning of this word 'religion'. Some definitions given in the dictionary are: 'Belief in God or way of worship or praying to God; obedience to God; binding man to God; practice of sacred rites; recognition of a higher unseen controlling power; one of the various systems of faith and worship based on such belief; life as lived under the rules of a monastic life.'

In considering these definitions, some aspects are in agreement with the principles of Buddhism, while others are not. We must remember that the word 'religion' is only an English word which has concepts linked to the beliefs of the English people. The Buddha did not speak English and of course he did not describe his teaching by using this term.

Generally, for practical purposes, we can describe Buddhism as a religion. Here, religion is taken to mean a method or way of life which was introduced for man to be righteous and noble, for him to maintain his human dignity and intelligence, and for him to attain final liberation through mental purity. Religion helps man to develop his mental processes and leads him to experience happiness and peace. There should not be any controversy in applying this word to Buddhism if it is understood that 'religion'

is used in this context. One should not be involved in hair-splitting arguments as to whether or not an ethical-moral system should be called a 'religion'. If it brings good results without the dependence on mere belief or imagination then it should be accepted.

Is Buddhism a Philosophy?

Philosophy is the search for knowledge, especially for the nature and meaning of existence. It is the 'love' for knowledge, but there is no mention about whether this knowledge would be translated into practical modes of behaviour to guide a person in his daily life. The Buddha's teaching is sublime and deep, surpassing the thoughts of even the most respected philosophers. But the Dhamma is not mere philosophy because philosophy is empirical by nature. It is a practical method which had been realised by the penetrative and analytical mind of the Buddha who taught the Dhamma for man's daily application.

The Buddha's doctrine of analysis is based on understanding and his own experiences. His approach to the problem of human suffering is essentially empirical and experimental, not speculative and metaphysical. The Dhamma is not founded on mere views or theories which, like many of the views given by different philosophers, contradict one another. A philosopher's contribution

is gauged from an intellectual standpoint, and not necessarily whether it contains elements of goodwill and compassion. By contrast, the Buddha's doctrine is not dry philosophy for people to talk about using cold intellect. It is a methodical system for self-development, centred on love, selflessness and compassion.

Buddhism is a philosophy to the extent that it describes the principles underlying the actions and behaviour of men and explains the nature of life. It suggests ways how we can lead a meaningful religious life without falling back on traditional beliefs which are based on the mythologies of primitive times. The Buddha wants us to lead a rational, noble way of life and use our human intelligence for the benefit of all. Hence, the Buddhist way of life is reasonable and practical for all times and in any society and country. It promotes harmony and does not create hostility or disturb the followers of other religions.

Buddhism is the treasure store of wisdom resulting from a most intensive search conducted by a prince imbued with infinite love and deep compassion for suffering humanity. This search was conducted over many of his lives and over an incomprehensible period of time. The good fruits of the practice of Buddhism can be experienced within this life itself as well as hereafter, for such is the nature of the Buddha Dhamma. Since Buddhism addresses itself

to the most pervasive problems of humanity and all living beings, namely, suffering, and it prescribes a method by which suffering and greed can be overcome, Buddhism can even more appropriately be regarded as a *mental therapy*.

Is Buddhism a Way of Life?

Buddhism is described by Western scholars as a way of life, since the belief in God (which is tied to their concept of religion) is not pivotal in the Buddha's teaching. But describing it as a way of life is insufficient to convey the full scope of the message disseminated by the Buddha.

Buddhism is a rational, liberal and noble method for those who sincerely want to understand the reality of life. It is a righteous way of life for man to do good, be good and lead a happy life without depending on external powers. It is a gradual path of mental evolution which culminates in supreme wisdom and perfection or liberation. No matter what label is attached to the teachings, the Dhamma remains as the absolute truth which can lead people to perfect peace and bliss.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, a religion is not something that has come down from heaven in order to teach man to fulfill a divine purpose, but a way of life which has developed on earth to satisfy the

intellectual and spiritual yearning of mankind. In practising Buddhism as a way of life, one should not depend on faith alone but use one's understanding and experience which have been accumulated through the use of human intelligence.

Practising Buddhists do not worry about changing circumstances which are yet to come. They maintain awareness of their mental state here and now. It is by being mindful of our present mental state and thoughts as they arise that we really come 'alive' during those moments. Otherwise, we are still dreaming of and living in the past or future. The future will look after itself if the present is well-lived. The strong emphasis on awareness and living in the present is also linked to reaping the results of our deeds here and now in this very life. In Buddhism, we do not have to wait for our next life to experience good results. It is, therefore, not some kind of an escapist asceticism, but a down-to-earth realism.

THREE ASPECTS TO UNDERSTANDING BUDDHISM

There are many aspects to consider in Buddhism, but a comprehensive treatment of the subject will certainly go beyond the scope of this booklet. For our purpose, let us consider only three aspects in the understanding and realisation of Buddhism, namely, the intellectual, spiritual, and practical aspects.

The Intellectual Aspect

The use of our intellect is important in understanding and practising the Buddha's teaching. Through analysis, we can realise the Truth at a deeper level, gain a proper understanding of our life and the nature of worldly conditions, and by so doing, gain more confidence and faith in the Dhamma.

Buddhism teaches that despite the importance placed on reason in understanding and appreciating the Dhamma, our intellect alone does not lead to mental purification. One cannot become perfect through mere intellect, no matter how well developed it may be. The factual knowledge of the Dhamma by itself does not develop a person's humane qualities if he does not train and purify his mind. Such knowledge should be accompanied by spiritual development, made possible through the practice of Dhamma.

The Spiritual Aspect

Spiritual perfection, an accomplishment which is most difficult but important, can only be gained through insight and realisation which bring about a complete transformation of one's thoughts and actions. Through mental purification, one realises the absolute truth and achieves purity of mind.

Selfish desire will have no place in that bright, dynamic and pure mind which is dedicated to doing what is good, without harbouring ulterior motives. A pure mind will enable a person to lead a noble life and practise important virtues such as honesty, selfless service, kindness, understanding, patience and tolerance.

The Practical Aspect

Buddhism is not a pack of beliefs, some mumbo-jumbo or a fabulous myth told to entertain the anxious mind or a nice fairy tale to satisfy the yearnings of emotion. It is a practical method for personal transformation and spiritual liberation taught by the Master. It is based on his own search and realisation.

Buddhism places heavy emphasis on practice. A person who is knowledgeable in the various doctrines but does not practise them is like one who could recite recipes from a huge cookery-book without trying to prepare a single dish. His hunger cannot be relieved by book knowledge alone.

A practical method to lead a Buddhist way of life is to cultivate the three ennobling qualities of *Dana-Sila-Bhavana*. When the practice of these three stages are well advanced, a person becomes a religious man in the truest sense.

1. *Dana* is charity or sacrificing something for the welfare of others in order to reduce selfish desire or greed.
2. *Sila* is upholding morality through self-discipline by leading a harmless and respectable life and by training the mind or the five senses not to become slaves to sensual pleasures. This kind of discipline trains one's mind and allows oneself and others to live peacefully.
3. *Bhavana* is mental culture for the purpose of cultivating the mind in order to maintain peace and happiness.

In leading mankind to a religious way of life, the Buddha did not impose any religious laws or commandments for people to obey, nor did he introduce a set of punishments for those who violate religious principles. He did not condemn or curse anybody who did not wish to follow his advice. In addition, he did not create fear in people's mind by threatening them with vivid descriptions of hell-fire. Instead, he advised people to practise the Dhamma by realising the value of good conduct and to give up evil practices after understanding the bad effects of such conduct.

The way of spiritual transformation rests on the three pillars of *Sila-Samadhi-Panna*, that is, morality,

mental development and wisdom. Without developing these qualities, one will have difficulties in leading a happy and peaceful life. This booklet will describe in some detail later what constitute each of the pillars.

At this juncture, it is useful to be reminded that *Panna* (wisdom or realisation) goes beyond mere knowledge, which could be obtained by reading a book or hearing a talk. Through the practice of morality (*Sila*) and mental development (*Samadhi*), one develops a penetrative insight and realisation into the nature of every existing thing in its proper perspective. This wisdom is gained by harnessing the purified mental energy pulsating in the cosmos through meditation. When realisation appears, the trained mind becomes an unshakeable dynamic force that can handle any human problem without anxiety, hatred or worry. That mind, suffused with wisdom and free from illusion or hallucination, is invaluable for understanding and overcoming worldly problems.

DOCTRINAL CONTENT OF BUDDHISM

The best source of information on the Buddhist doctrine and the practice of *Sila-Samadhi-Panna* is the *Tripitaka*, which contains 45 years of the Buddha's sermons and ministry. The *Tripitaka* is divided into the *Sutta*, *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma*. The *Sutta Pitaka* contains the conventional or simple teaching on how to lead a noble life. The *Vinaya*

Pitaka contains the disciplinary code for those who have renounced the worldly life to lead a pure, monastic life, while moral psychology and in-depth analysis of the mind and elements is contained in the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*.

The core of Buddhism is contained within the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path, which is also the Fourth Noble Truth taught by the Buddha, can be summarised into the practice of *Sila-Samadhi-Panna* described earlier. In addition, to gain a proper perspective in life, it is also important for us to discuss the doctrines of *kamma* and rebirth in order to realise that we are the masters of our own destiny.

Message of All Buddhas

Before discussing the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, it will be useful for us to state in very few words what the Buddha taught. Is it possible for us to summarise the 45 years of the Buddha's ministry and the Truth contained in the *Tripitaka*.

The Buddha's teaching may be summarised in the following words:

*Not to do evil,
To do good,
To purify the mind.*

Simple as these words may seem, this advice contains the pith of the teaching of all Buddhas. It may be simple enough for a child to understand, but may take many lifetimes to perfect.

The Buddhas or the Enlightened Ones appear in this world from time to time to convey the same message. Buddhas do not have different or conflicting messages because there is but one Truth, and the Buddhas have realised IT. Out of compassion, they teach us to walk along this same path of Righteousness to realise the way to happiness, just like they did. By walking this Path, it is possible for us to realise our potential for awakening and becoming Buddhas just like them.

This advice teaches us to be perfect in thought and conduct. To begin with, there are five moral principles or precepts for Buddhists to observe in their daily life. The Five Precepts are: abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, and taking intoxicating drugs and liquor. These do not encompass all evil deeds, but it is good to try not to violate at least these five moral principles to start with.

The precepts are training rules voluntarily undertaken by the individual to help him lead a harmless life, a life filled with compassion, generosity, contentment, truthfulness and mindfulness. Can a

rational, far-sighted person point out anything wrong with living in accordance with these training rules? What would happen to a society if every one of its members goes against these principles?

In his infinite wisdom, the Buddha knew that we cannot be perfect at once. Hence, he starts us off by encouraging us to restrain from committing these five harmful deeds. Once we make progress in laying down a firm moral foundation, we can gradually practise mental purification. Buddhism allows an individual to make progress on the basis of his level of realisation and does not dogmatically impose on him a rigid code of conduct without regard to his potentials, level of development and attitudes.

These five precepts are useful for cultivating humane qualities and virtues such as kindness, honesty and understanding. These are qualities important for maintaining peace and security. The motivation for upholding these precepts is not the fear of punishment, but understanding and compassion. When the Buddha said, 'Not to do evil', it was with the welfare of others in mind.

As human beings, it is our duty to perform some service to others by practising generosity, kindness and giving a helping hand to others who need our support to rid themselves of grievances, worries and other problems. By rendering selfless service to

others, not only do we bring benefits to others, we reduce our selfishness as well. We should not perform a good deed with ulterior motives, since our deeds will be marred by the impure intentions.

So the real Buddhist concept of 'Not to do evil' and 'To do good' is not based on punishment and reward, but on the need to reduce our selfish desire and cultivate our mental purity. We do not use fear to force people into complying with these precepts. Using fear instead of understanding will not give rise to the cultivation of sympathetic feelings and can result in people becoming superstitious and dogmatic.

The avoidance of evil and the performance of good are highly commendable, but they are not enough. From experience we know that as long as the greed, anger and illusion which are deeply embedded in the mind are not removed, we are still capable of committing some bad deeds. Hence, there is a need for us to purify the mind. To do this, we will have to constantly watch the mind and remove from it mental impurities. When impure thoughts and motivations are extinguished, the mind is always good and pure, and we will reach the final goal.

The Noble Truths

A clear understanding of the Four Noble Truths is fundamental to the practice of Buddhism. These

truths consist of the realisation of the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering, the freedom from suffering, and the method to bring an end to the suffering and achieve liberation. Without an understanding of these four important truths, we will not realise the nature of human problems and will have to continue experiencing suffering. We struggle to escape from unsatisfactoriness, but without the necessary insight we will not find the way to remove the root cause of our problems. In fact through ignorance we create more problems as a result of our misguided conception of the world.

In only one religion — Buddhism — are the Four Noble Truths explained with such clarity. Through the understanding of these truths, we realise that suffering is nothing more than the unsatisfactoriness regarding our lives and feelings. The causes of unsatisfactoriness are natural and are not created by anybody or any power. In every element and form of energy, friction, clashes, imbalances or changes take place continually, as confirmed by science. All visible objects exist as a result of friction which causes change, and change is the characteristic of life. When this state of flux which we experience physically and mentally at every moment is compounded with human emotion and craving, we experience unsatisfactoriness or suffering.

From the Dhamma we realise that the cause of suffering is not the 'original sin' or due to a curse or

influence of any god, devil or ghost, as believed by some religion, but by our own craving for existence and sense pleasures. People experience suffering when they give in to ignorance and try to satisfy their insatiable sense desires, which can only lead to worries, fear, and disappointments. Therefore, when a person realises the Four Noble Truths, he takes steps to overcome his unhappiness by reducing his craving and aversion, which are the roots of all evil actions.

The Noble Path

After realising the cause of suffering, we can eradicate it by following the method prescribed by the Buddha. This method or path is called the Noble Eightfold Path, which is to be practised by anyone who wishes to experience peace and happiness.

This noble path consists of the following eight factors: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. A person strengthens his *Sila* or moral discipline by practising Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. *Samadhi* or mental culture is developed through the application of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. The development of *Sila* and *Samadhi* will give rise to *Panna* or wisdom which comprises Right Understanding and Right

Thought. The uniqueness and supremacy in the Buddha's teachings rest in this practical method. When practised, it is possible for a person to purify his mind and undergo spiritual development to become someone perfect and noble.

The Noble Eightfold Path is universal in character and brings good results when applied not only to those who profess Buddhism, but to anyone who puts it into practice. There is no denying that when practising this method we will have from time to time to face difficulties which can be overcome by applying right effort. But if we choose not to follow this path, we are not free from difficulties either. We will have to face other kinds of difficulties, the most serious of all is that the opportunities for doing good and meeting good, spiritual friends becomes markedly reduced. It is so easy for one to go from spiritual light to darkness; it is so difficult to go from darkness to spiritual light.

Nibbana

The Noble Eightfold Path relieves one from suffering and brings happiness and peace in this present and future lives. But this is not all. The practice of this path will ultimately lead one to the attainment of the ultimate bliss of *Nibbana*. *Nibbana* is not a mystical concept, but a perfect expression

of an Absolute which goes beyond any expression of happiness as defined in a worldly sense.

If we can understand the reality of ourselves, we can easily understand what the Buddha taught. We may go around the world in search of the truth revealed by him, but we will not find it until we search within ourselves using *insight meditation* as taught by the Buddha. Through insight meditation, we can penetrate into reality and gain complete freedom from birth, decay, worries, miseries and unsatisfactoriness. We attain the peace, happiness and tranquillity known as *Nibbana*, the fruit obtained by someone who has developed his mind to the apex of purity and perfection.

From the discussion on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, it is clear that the way to liberation is through the practice of the Dhamma and does not involve the intervention or grace of a god or brahma. Therefore, we must not be passive and fatalistic by hoping that someone out there will save us from the rounds of *Samsara*. If we cultivate ourselves to be wholesome beings, the results will come as a natural course of events. In addition, Buddhists do not believe that a person will have to face the rewards of and punishments for his deeds because of his fate or through the judgment of some divine being. Instead, it is the operation of the natural law of moral causation or *kamma* that brings happiness or suffering to a person.

Kamma

The kammic law of cause and effect is important in helping us understand the cause of inequalities among mankind. We are all conditioned by our wholesome or unwholesome thoughts, words and actions. Whatever actions we perform intentionally are motivated by wholesome or unwholesome thoughts. Based on these motivations, we create accordingly good or bad *kamma*. Good *kamma* bring good results, while bad *kamma* bring bad results. The results of our good and bad *kamma* can ripen either within this lifetime or hereafter.

The kammic law is a natural, universal law and is not created by any supreme being. Through the operation of this law, all beings reap the fruits of their deeds which enable some to be born rich, handsome and well-respected, while others are born poor, ugly and of lowly birth. Buddhism does not accept the belief that a god or devil is responsible for the differences among beings. The Buddha says that pleasant and unpleasant feelings are not created by God as reward or punishment, but arise as a natural effect of our own good and bad actions. Everyone has to experience the good and bad effects of his or her actions, regardless of whether he or she believes in *kamma* or not.

Therefore, unlike what some people believe, man is certainly not an experiment started by a super-

natural being and who can be done away with when unwanted. Buddhism regards man as being capable of developing his understanding to free himself from suffering if he is shown how his ignorance can be removed.

Rebirth

According to the Buddha, the present life is not the first nor will it be the last. The life process continues so long as the craving for existence prevails in the mind, and this craving, in turn, accumulates good and bad kammic forces. Therefore, as long as these conditioning forces and the craving for existence remain, rebirth will continue to occur.

Our existence does not begin with this human life nor does it end with an eternal life in heaven or hell. Our lives have been evolving over countless existences according to quality of our accumulated *kamma*. This process will continue until a person someday realises the causes of his existence, and through realisation he works towards bringing this process to a complete and irrevocable end. That attainment is the final goal called *Nibbana*.

Rebirth rather than reincarnation is taught in Buddhism. The difference is that in reincarnation it is believed that a soul undergoes repeated births, while rebirth does not subscribe to the idea of a soul.

How rebirth is possible without a soul as taught in Buddhism is a revolutionary religious idea. All other religions before or after the Buddha strongly upheld the belief in a soul because without it, they could not explain what would happen to life after death. The Buddha has very clearly explained how rebirth can take place without such an entity. According to Buddhism, the belief in a soul is the result of the misconception or misunderstanding of human consciousness. To understand the Buddha's interpretation of rebirth, one must study Buddhist psychology on the nature of mental faculties and the nature of kammic forces and cosmic energies. *

Man is reborn continually in *Samsara* until he realises the value of rising above all human weaknesses by cultivating a noble mind. When he is ready to accept the responsibilities of life and to develop a penetrative understanding into reality, he begins to move in an upward spiral. A man can save himself through his own efforts, guided by Dhamma. In this context, the Buddha is regarded as a saviour in so far as he has shown the path for man to save himself.

In Buddhism, the destiny of man is, therefore, not placed at the mercy of a supernatural being who acts at his whims to grant salvation, but is determined by

For a better understanding of this process, refer to *Do You Believe In Rebirth* by the author.

the effort made by a person to cultivate wholesome thoughts, words and actions. When a person fully understands his moral responsibilities, he is suddenly raised from a piteous state of helplessness to someone filled with inspiration, responsibility and self-respect.

PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM IN MODERN SOCIETY

After discussing some important doctrines as taught by the Buddha, it will be useful to examine how some of the teachings can be applied in modern society in general and in the Malaysian context in particular.

Culture, Rites and Rituals

Although religious rites, rituals and ceremonies are not favoured by intellectuals, such practices are important for developing and maintaining the devotional aspects of a religion and for creating a sense of inspiration among the masses. For many people, cultivating devotion is the first important step towards the experience of a religion. If there is no devotional and cultural aspect in Buddhism, people who are attracted to rites and ceremonies may be drawn to some other kinds of beliefs which offer these practices, although they are steeped in superstition or blind faith.

It is important for religions to have some harmless and reasonable practices for people to express their devotion and spiritual feelings. Many of the Buddhist ceremonies help to cultivate good habits and positive emotions in the followers so that they become kind, considerate and cultured people. When performed with understanding and earnestness, these practices strengthen one's qualities and avoid an over-intellectualisation of Buddhism which could make it seem rather cold, detached and academic.

An effective way to introduce moral lessons is by using pictures, symbols and images and giving entertaining talks by injecting amusing but instructive anecdotes. This method appeals to many people, especially the young and it can help them understand certain aspects of Buddhism. Certain stage performances depicting historical Buddhist events can help to create a good impression in young minds.

The Buddha's advice regarding traditions and customs was neither to accept nor to reject anything without considering whether such practices are meaningful and useful to all. Less dependence is placed on these methods once a person has learned the Dhamma to lead a meaningful Buddhist life. The Buddha says that whatever methods we use to train the mind, our attitude should be like a man who uses a raft to get across a river. After crossing the river, he does not cling to the raft, but leaves it on the other

side to continue his journey. Similarly, cultural practices should be regarded merely as an aid to gain inspiration and not as an end in themselves.

Buddhist cultural practices vary from country to country. When performing these traditional practices, we must be careful enough not to categorise Buddhism as belonging to one of them. For example, we should not think of Chinese Buddhism, Sinhalese Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, etc. This creates disharmony and misunderstanding. We should also be aware of some so-called Buddhist leaders who try to reinforce their own Buddhist labels by incorporating many forms of charms, divine powers, mystical and supernatural concepts to hoodwink the masses. Such unscrupulous actions are done with a total disregard of what the Buddha has said about such practices.

The Buddhist Concept of Worship

Ignorant critics always condemn the practice of paying homage in front of a Buddha image as idol worshipping. To them, this practice is bad. But they do not realise the significance of paying respects to a Master who has taught mankind how to lead a noble religious life. They do not realise this is the way Buddhists appreciate the Enlightenment, perfections, wisdom, and sacredness of the Buddha and the noble services he rendered to humanity. In failing

to understand these reasons, they criticise Buddhists for keeping Buddha images.

Is paying respect to a Buddha image indispensable in Buddhism? The image is not compulsory for a person to lead a Buddhist life, but paying respects before a Buddha image is a meaningful and harmless form of devotional practice. It is difficult to understand why others exploit this issue to condemn a gentle religion. Do Buddhists violate any moral principles or violate the peace and happiness of others when they pay respects to their Master who is symbolised by an image?

The Buddha did not advocate any rites and rituals, but concentrated only on disseminating the Dhamma and pointing out the righteous way of life. He did not even ask his followers to worship him by erecting images. Long after the Buddha passed away, some of his followers erected his images but only as a mark of respect. The image symbolises the perfections of the Buddha — his purity, compassion and wisdom — noble qualities which are highly regarded by all cultured people. In any case, the Buddha image is one of the most beautiful works of art man is capable of. Many unbiased non-Buddhists also keep Buddha images because they appreciate how an image of the Buddha can create a deep sense of calmness in the mind. Gazing at the Buddha image has therapeutic value.

Distorted Images

On the other hand, when we observe how some of the so-called Buddhists practise this religion, it is difficult to argue that they are not idol worshippers because their entire religious activities centre around this form of reverence, as if this is the most important aspect of Buddhism. Acting on ignorance, they have developed mythological beliefs and erected various kinds of images with many faces, hands, eyes and heads, superstitiously thinking that they can achieve their worldly needs by appealing to such images. These images only reflect the limited understanding and confused mental attitude of those who introduce them.

The time has come for people to recognise the real Dhamma, to be less superstitious about such images and to maintain the Buddha image as the focal point of their devotion. If people can do that, the good name of Buddhism can be upheld. We can practise Buddhism while maintaining our traditions, but we should refrain from introducing our own traditions as Buddhism. Because traditional Buddhists continue to practise their old ethnic rites, people mistake or misinterpret these practises as Buddhism. Certain unscrupulous missionaries take advantage of the situation to ridicule and condemn Buddhism, as a ploy to indoctrinate people and convert them into their religion.

Therefore, those who wish to perform such ceremonies as part of their cultural practices should take care not to confuse them with Buddhism or to carry them out in Buddhist temples. They must take care not to allow such practices to create wrong impressions amongst the public and cause damage to Buddhism.

Confidence and a Religious Life

Religious devotion can be misdirected if proper understanding is not developed. Devotees should guard themselves against being emotionally manipulated by various individuals and groups who try to win converts or to gain some personal benefit. We must develop confidence in the Dhamma which shows the way to cultivate ourselves to the highest level by practising all the good qualities and avoiding human weaknesses.

Buddhism teaches that a truly religious life is one based on moral discipline and mental training and not through mere faith or praying to external powers. A religious man is one who contributes to the peaceful co-existence among beings and practises goodwill, compassion, harmony and understanding. The duty of a religion is to train the human mind to achieve this end and to guide humanity towards spiritual development, a noble attainment sadly lacking among humankind today.

The lack of spiritual development brings about worldly-minded and selfish people who are the cause of many human problems. Some of these people build a religious philosophy around their materialist orientations. By so doing, the religion they practice loses its purity and has only turned into another convenient means for people to justify their materialistic desires. Buddhism teaches that there is one method for worldly, material gain and another for spiritual development. We should not regard material gain as being synonymous with religious development. At the same time, leading a religious lay life does not mean that one should neglect one's occupation and become careless with one's wealth and property. We should not practise our religion in such a way that it disrupts and destroys the potential for material growth. Conversely, a religious person should try to achieve material aims without in any way violating the peace and happiness of others.

Tolerance in Buddhism

The spirit of tolerance in Buddhism is remarkable. It has contributed to the maintenance of a peaceful, healthy religious atmosphere amongst different religious groups and various Buddhist denominations without any bloodshed for the last 2,500 years. This is indeed a commendable achievement in the history of religions. Buddhism is liberal in that it guides us to lead normal lives without undergoing suffering in

the name of religion. As Buddhists we need not become slaves either to sense pleasures or to any supernatural power. But by cultivating human dignity, virtue and intelligence, we can gain true wisdom which will conquer all ignorance.

Buddhism does not encourage people to depend on supernatural or miraculous powers for spiritual development. The belief in miraculous powers and mystical powers in themselves will never give anyone mental purity. Purity in Buddhism is not based on physical phenomenology, but psychological purity.

Some missionaries condemn Buddhists by calling them names such as heathens, pagans and idol worshippers, but Buddhists never condemn the followers of other religions in retaliation. They never claim that the followers of other religions will not get the chance to experience heavenly bliss. In short, while practising their own religion, Buddhists respect the right of other people to practise their own religions. They can agree to disagree with other religionists amicably, without creating conflict and hostility or giving up their own Buddhist concepts. This religion does not condemn other religionists as sinners, but respects the teachings of all the other religious teachers who tried to uplift the moral standards of society.

Buddhism is not a 'lazy man's' religion which teaches that salvation can be gained through prayers

alone, nor a 'Yes man's' religion which accommodates all the beliefs and practices upheld by the so-called Buddhists as well as other religionists. Buddhism has its own identity. If the practices of others are not meaningful and justifiable, Buddhists believe that it is their duty to gently point out the Buddhist point of view so that people can reconsider their actions and beliefs. This should not be viewed as criticism.

Concept of God and Sin

According to Buddhism, the belief in the forgiveness of sins by a supernatural being is not justifiable. The effects of certain evil deeds that we have committed can only be overcome by increasing our meritorious deeds and maintaining healthy, pure minds. This cannot be done by merely praying to anybody.

This is a religion for people to practise on the basis of their own convictions and understanding and not out of the fear of eternal hell fire. The idea of being made to suffer eternally in hell is foreign to Buddhism which teaches that both enjoyments and suffering are temporary and not eternal.

The belief in a creator God is the most important concept to the followers of every religion. To them, there is no life or religion without God. However,

Buddhism does not acknowledge the same belief. The concept of God in Buddhism is entirely different from that in the other religions. Buddhists work for their salvation by leading a noble, religious life and through mental purification without depending on any God. Yet, they do accept the existence of many gods. To Buddhists, gods can help materially but they are not all-powerful and cannot help us to achieve mental purification and final salvation. We must do that ourselves.

Confusion in Modern Buddhism

So far, we have touched on the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, its purpose, concepts, practices, the ultimate goal of life as well as how to overcome human problems. We have also discussed the Buddhist attitude towards various other viewpoints, why intellectuals respect this profound teaching, and how narrow minded people condemn this religion and exploit Buddhist tolerance. Let us now try to examine some of the problems which exist among Buddhists themselves so that we can enhance our understanding and practice of this religion and be worthy disciples of our great teacher.

At the beginning, different schools of Buddhism sprang up in India due to different views held regarding certain aspects of the Buddha's teaching. The followers did not do this for their personal gain

or power nor out of any ulterior motive. But today it seems that many different sects of Buddhism are trying to introduce their own form of Buddhism with some motives of their own with the result that they depart from the original message of the Buddha.

The Buddha's message which has been introduced as Buddhism is meant for all mankind and not merely for one particular race or country. If people understand this, there will be no need for them to talk about the different brands of Buddhism because Buddhism means Truth. The Truth is for all and no particular group can pretend to monopolise it.

Different Brands of Buddhism

Since Buddhism does not command people to do away with age-old cultural traditions in order to practise this religion, people have taken advantage of this by adopting many kinds of practices not in conformity with the teaching of the Buddha. In various countries which had accepted Buddhism, the followers have incorporated many of their traditional practices into Buddhism and eventually introduced the Buddha's teaching according to their beliefs and understanding. This has resulted in Sri Lankan Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism, Indian Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Korean Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Western Buddhism. This is in marked contrast

to the policy of other religions which demand that existing traditional beliefs must be cast aside after conversion.

While the diversity of Buddhist practices has provided a richness of a wide variety of religious cultures, unfortunately the liberal Buddhist attitude towards traditional practices has become a stumbling block in the effort to create Buddhist unity. It has also created feelings of superiority among some groups of Buddhists which have led to discrimination amongst the followers of Buddhism in their respective countries. Each group tries to glorify its own form of Buddhism as being far superior to that of others. But these groups do not realise that in doing so, they are exposing their own egoism in the name of Buddhism. They emphasise more on these cultural practises and introduce them as part of Buddhism. They also try to create false confidence in the minds of others by suggesting that the Buddha had revealed those practices secretly to some of his favourite disciples. This assertion cannot be supported because the Buddha had proclaimed that there were no secrets in his teaching and that he had revealed all the important doctrines to all his disciples. In addition, many of those practices that people believe to be the teaching of the Buddha are not found in the original Pali *Tripitaka*. Some realise that it is only through these practices that they can gain more popularity to achieve their own ends.

Buddhist Concoctions

Some Buddhist groups try to accommodate and practise all kinds of beliefs and traditions to show that they are working for religious harmony amongst the different schools of Buddhism. Such an approach does not really bring harmony because there soon appears yet another sect which claims to have chosen the eclectic approach. If they were to practise Buddhism that way, it is difficult to understand what they would introduce as the basic teachings or the absolute truth of the Master. One must try to follow the guidelines given by the Buddha without mistaking cultural traditions for the Dhamma. Those who try to incorporate all the traditions, beliefs and customs as practised or adopted in different countries are like those who take a mixture of different kinds of medicines such as Western medicine, Indian medicine, Chinese medicine and other native medicine, when they are sick. Instead of getting cured, such a mixture can aggravate the sickness. That is why we must have a particular method to practise Buddhism and it has to be one which can be supported by the original teaching of the Buddha.

Buddhists at the Crossroads

In a country like Malaysia where there exist many Buddhist traditions, Buddhists face difficulties in choosing a method for them to practise. In traditional Buddhist countries, there is a particular method of

practising Buddhism according to their culture. But here, some religious masters, preachers and gurus who come from other countries try to introduce Buddhism according to their own beliefs, traditions and customs, and maintain that their practices are more effective and purer than those of others. While appreciating their services, we should like to mention that more misunderstanding and confusion are created among local people who listen to many of these visiting religious masters. This situation has become a big problem especially among the youths or who try to understand the basic teaching of the Buddha. Although there are many Buddhist schools in Malaysia with their traditional beliefs and cultural practices, the best advice that we can give to beginners who have problems choosing which tradition to follow is to study the basic teaching of the Buddha first-hand before they attempt to follow any religious master from a particular school of Buddhism..

The problems faced by the Buddhist community are many. Many elders pay more attention to their traditional practices and are ignorant about the Teaching. Some Western-oriented young people study the intellectual aspects of the Dhamma, sometimes at the neglect of the actual practice as well as the other invaluable aspects of the religion. Many who are born Buddhists remain as free thinkers and are not committed to any religious values. There are

very few facilities available in this country where young Buddhists can learn about their religion, even in many Buddhist temples. Temples are maintained only as places of worship or for tourism rather than places where people can learn the Dhamma. Those who had their education in missionary schools have been influenced by the indoctrination of other religionists so that they do not know how to appreciate their own religion. Some carry out cultural practices under the guise of 'Buddhism' and this has contributed to making a mockery of this noble religion in the eyes of those who are not familiar with the true Buddhist culture, history and way of life.

Buddha in Different Names

Some Buddhists try to introduce different Buddhas by using a variety of names. They also single out one particular Buddha as *their* Buddha whom they claim to be the most powerful and 'true' Buddha. Such claims reflect their poor mentality. They coin various names for the Buddhas according to their limited way of thinking and judge the validity of a Buddha based on their selfish personal needs. The Enlightened Buddhas who appeared on this earth from time to time should not be discriminated in any way whatsoever. All of them gained the same enlightenment, the same perfection and expounded the same doctrine. The appearances of such Buddhas in the world are very rare, but these people with their lively

imaginations conjure different names of the Buddha whom they introduce from time to time as *real* Buddhas. Such proliferation of claims and beliefs has contributed to a great deal of confusion in the Buddhist community. Today, there is even competition within the Buddhist community in commercialising the names and images of the Buddhas.

Publications

Buddhist publications themselves create problems. Numerous books and booklets have been published and distributed as Buddhist literature in many parts of the world. But very unfortunately, it is hard to say whether many of these publications contain any real teachings of the Buddha. Sometimes they create more superstitious beliefs and confusion. On the other hand, some writers try to show their scholarship by bringing forth various speculative issues as an attempt to show the superiority of their particular school and their own scholarship. Then there are the books written by non-Buddhists who deliberately or through ignorance distort the true teachings by misinterpreting what the Buddha taught. If the readers are unbiased and well-informed, they can easily see through these writings and realise that these are the works of unscrupulous intellectual fools who create more confusion among the public and encourage discrimination within the Buddhist community. On the other hand, if the readers have a shallow knowledge of the basic teachings of the Buddha, they may

lose confidence in Buddhism after reading such publications. The problem is some writers have commercialised their publications for their personal gain and have never considered the damage that they create by misleading people in the name of Buddhism.

Under such trying conditions where diverse interpretations of Buddhism prevail, we should return to the true Dhamma taught by the Buddha. To distinguish true Dhamma from other teachings, there is no better way than to use the criteria given by the Buddha himself. Speaking of the test of Dhamma to Maha Pajapati, the Blessed One said —

‘These are not Dhamma:

‘The teachings and doctrines that conduce to passion, not to dispassion; to bondage, not to detachment; to increase of worldly possessions, not to their decrease; to greed, not to abstinence; to discontent, not to content; to company, not to solitude; to slothfulness, not to energy; to delight in evils, not to delight in good — of such teachings and doctrines you may say firmly: ‘These are not Dhamma, This is not the message of the Master.’

‘But these are Dhamma:

‘Of whatever teachings and doctrines you can assume yourself that they are the opposite of these

things, you may then say firmly; 'These are Dhamma. This is the message of the Master'.'

CONCLUSION

Buddhism originated in India and many Buddhist practices were nurtured according to Indian traditions and environment. Despite its place of origin, the Dhamma or Sublime Teaching that the Buddha expounded is timeless and universal, and is not confined to the Indian sub-continent but is meant for all mankind. He has given all the necessary advice to guide mankind to lead a noble way of life and experience spiritual solace and fulfillment. In his teaching, the Buddha discusses all the existing human problems and the ways to overcome them so that true peace and happiness can be maintained.

There is an urgent need today for Buddhist leaders, writers and devotees to understand that the essence of the Buddha's Teaching is unalterable and constant. We must learn to forget our differences and develop the important fundamental aspects of Buddhist practices which are common to all schools of Buddhism. Buddhism must transcend all national, racial, and cultural barriers.

We must study the Teaching in its original form and mould our lives accordingly. It is through the

practice of Dhamma that the real Buddha can be known. The Buddha has said, 'He who sees the Dhamma sees me.' The Dhamma is not a set of teachings for us to accept and believe in, but to try out and see for ourselves. Our Enlightened Master himself said: '*Ehipassiko*', that is, 'Come and See!' If we accept the Dhamma as our refuge and guide, we will need no other authority.

"In the unessential they imagine the essential, in the essential they see the unessential, — they who entertain (such) wrong thoughts never realise the essence."

Dhammapada — 11

THE LAST WORDS OF THE BUDDHA

Then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Ananda: 'It may be, Ananda, that to some of you the thought may come: "Here are (we have) the Words of the Teacher who is gone; our Teacher we have with us no more". But Ananda, it should not be considered in this light. What I have taught and laid down, Ananda, as Doctrine (*Dhamma*) and Discipline (*Vinaya*), this will, be your teacher when I am gone.

'Just as, Ananda, the bhikkhus now address one another with the word "Friend" (*Avuso*), they should not do so when I am gone. A senior bhikkhu, Ananda, may address a junior by his name, his family name or with the word "Friend"; a junior bhikkhu should address a senior as "Sir" (*Bhante*) or "Venerable" (*Ayasma*).

Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus: 'It may be, Bhikkhus, that there may be doubt or

perplexity in the mind of even one bhikkhu about the Buddha, or the Dhamma, or the Sangha, or the Path, or the Practice. Ask Bhikkhus. Do not reproach yourselves afterwards with the thought: "Our Teacher was face to face with us; we could not ask the Blessed One when we were face to face with him".'

When this was said, the bhikkhus remained silent.

A second time and a third time too the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus ... as above.

The bhikkhus remained silent even for the third time.

Then the Blessed One addressed them and said: 'It may be, Bhikkhus, that you put no questions out of reverence for your Teacher. Then, Bhikkhus, let friend speak to friend.'

Even at this, those bhikkhus remained silent.

Then the Venerable Ananda said to the Blessed One: 'It is wonderful, Sir. It is marvellous, Sir. I have this faith, Sir, in the community of bhikkhus here, that not even one of them has any doubt or perplexity about the Buddha, or the Dhamma, or the Sangha; or the Path, or the Practice.'

'You speak out of faith, Ananda. But in this matter, Ananda, the Tathagata (i.e. Buddha) knows, and knows for certain, that in this community of bhikkhus there is not even one bhikkhu who has any doubt or perplexity about the Buddha, or the Dhamma, or the Sangha, or the Path, or the Practice. Indeed, Ananda, even the lowest in spiritual attainments among these five hundred bhikkhus is a Stream-entrant (Sotapanna), not liable to fall (into lower states), is assured, and is bound for Enlightenment.'

Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus, saying: 'Then, Bhikkhus, I address you now: *Transient are conditioned things. Try to accomplish your aim with diligence.*'

(From the Mahaparinibbana-sutta of the Digha-nikaya, Sutta No. 16)

RELIGION IN A SCIENTIFIC AGE

The background of the cover is a light gray color. A large, dark gray square is positioned in the center, slightly offset to the right. Within this square, there are several concentric white arcs that form a partial circle on the left side and a partial circle on the right side. The title 'RELIGION IN A SCIENTIFIC AGE' is printed in white, uppercase letters across the top of the cover, partially overlapping the dark gray square.

Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

RELIGION IN A SCIENTIFIC AGE

Today we live in a scientific age in which almost every aspect of our lives has been affected by science. Since the scientific revolution during the seventeenth century, science has continued to exert tremendous influence on what we do.

The impact of science has been particularly strong on traditional religious beliefs. Many basic religious concepts are crumbling under the pressure of modern science and are no longer acceptable to the intellectual and the well-informed man. No longer is it possible to assert truth derived merely through theological speculations or based on the authority of religious scriptures in isolation to scientific consideration. For example, the findings of modern psychologists indicate that the human mind, like the physical body, work according to natural, causal laws without the presence of an unchanging soul as taught by some religions.

Some religionists choose to disregard scientific discoveries which conflict with their religious dogmas.

Such rigid mental habits are indeed a hindrance to human progress. Since the modern man refuses to believe anything blindly, even though it had been traditionally accepted, such religionists will only succeed in increasing the ranks of non-believers with their faulty theories.

On the other hand, some religionists have found it necessary to accommodate popularly accepted scientific theories by giving new interpretations to their religious dogmas. A case in point is Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Many religionists maintain that man was directly created by God. Darwin, on the other hand, claimed that man had evolved from the ape, a theory which upset the doctrines of divine creation and the fall of man. Since all enlightened thinkers have accepted Darwin's theory, the theologians today have little choice except to give a new interpretation to their doctrines to suit this theory which they had opposed for so long.

In the light of modern scientific discoveries, it is not difficult to understand that many of the views held in many religions regarding the universe

and life are merely conventional thoughts of that which have long been superceded. It is generally true to say that religions have greatly contributed to human development and progress. They have laid down values and standards and formulated principles to guide human life. But for all the good they have done, religions can no longer survive in the modern, scientific age if the followers insist on imprisoning truth into set forms and dogmas, on encouraging rituals and beliefs which have been depleted of their original meaning.

Buddhism and Science

Until the beginning of the last century, Buddhism was confined to countries untouched by modern science. Nevertheless, from its very beginning, the Teachings of the Buddha were always open to scientific thinking.

One reason why the Teaching can easily be embraced by the scientific spirit is that the Buddha never encouraged rigid, dogmatic belief. He did not claim to base His Teachings on faith, belief, or divine revelation, but allowed great flexibility and freedom of thought.

The second reason is that the scientific spirit can be found in the Buddha's approach to spiritual Truth. The Buddha's method for discovering and testing spiritual Truth is very similar to that of the scientist. A Scientist observes the external world objectively, and would only establish a scientific theory after conducting many successful practical experiments.

Using a similar approach 25 centuries ago, the Buddha observed the inner world with detachment, and encouraged His disciples not to accept any teaching until they had critically investigated and personally verified its truth. Just as the scientist today would not claim that this experiment cannot be duplicated by others, the Buddha did not claim that His experience of Enlightenment was exclusive to Him. Thus, in His approach to Truth, the Buddha was as analytical as the present day scientist. He established a practical, scientifically worked-out method for reaching the Ultimate Truth and the experience of Enlightenment.

While Buddhism is very much in line with the scientific spirit, it is *not correct to equate* Buddhism

with science. It is true that the practical applications of science have enabled mankind to live more comfortable lives and experience wonderful things undreamed of before. Science has made it possible for man to swim better than the fishes, fly higher than the birds, and walk on the moon. Yet the sphere of knowledge acceptable to conventional, scientific wisdom is confined to empirical evidence. And scientific truth is subject to constant change. Science cannot give man control over his mind and neither does it offer moral control and guidance. Despite its wonders, science has indeed many limitations not shared by Buddhism.

Limitations of Science

Often one hears so much about science and what it can do, and so little about what it cannot do. Scientific knowledge is *limited* to the data received through the sense organs. It does not recognise reality which transcends sense-data. Scientific truth is built upon logical observations of sense-data which are continually changing. Scientific truth is, therefore, relative truth not intended to stand the test of time. And a scientist, being aware of this fact, is always willing to discard a theory if it can

be replaced by a better one.

Science attempts to understand the outer world and has barely scratched the surface of man's inner world. Even the science of psychology has not really fathomed the underlying cause of man's mental unrest. When a man is frustrated and disgusted with life, and his inner world is filled with disturbances and unrest, science today is very much unequipped to help him. The social sciences which cater for man's environment may bring him a certain degree of happiness. But unlike an animal man requires more than mere physical comfort and needs help to cope with his frustrations and miseries arising from his daily experiences.

Today so many people are plagued with fear, restlessness, and insecurity. Yet science fails to succour them. Science is unable to teach the common man to control his mind when he is driven by the animal nature that burns within him.

Can science make man better? If it can, why do violent acts and immoral practices abound in countries which are so advanced in science? Isn't it fair to say that despite all the scientific progress

achieved and the advantages conferred on man, science leaves the inner man basically unchanged: it has only heightened man's feelings of dependence and insufficiency? In addition to its failure to bring security to mankind, science has also made everyone feel even more insecure by threatening the world with the possibility of wholesale destruction.

Science is *unable* to provide a meaningful purpose of life. It cannot provide man clear reasons for living. In fact, science is thoroughly secular in nature and unconcerned with man's spiritual goal. The materialism inherent in scientific thought denies the psyche goals higher than material satisfaction. By its selective theorizing and relative truths, science disregards some of the most essential issues and leaves many questions unanswered. For instance, when asked why great inequalities exist among men, no scientific explanation can be given to such questions which are beyond its narrow confines.

Learned Ignorance

The transcendental mind developed by the Buddha is not limited to sense-data and goes beyond the logic trapped within the limitation of relative

perception. The human intellect, on the contrary, operates on the basis of information it collects and stores, whether in the field of religion, philosophy, science or art. The information for the mind is gathered through our sense organs which are inferior in so many ways. The very limited information perceived makes our understanding of the world distorted.

Some people are proud of the fact that they know so much. In fact, the less we know, the more certain we are in our explanations; the more we know, the more we realize our limitations.

A brilliant scholar once wrote a book which he considered as the ultimate work. He felt that the book contained all the literary gems and philosophies. Being proud of his achievement, he showed his masterpiece to a colleague of his who was equally brilliant with the request that the book be reviewed by him. Instead, his colleague asked the author to write down on a piece of paper all he knew and all he did not know. The author sat down deep in thought, but after a long while failed to write down anything he knew. Then he turned his mind to the

second question, and again he failed to write down anything he did not know. Finally, with his ego at the lowest ebb, he gave up, realizing that all that he knew was really ignorance.

In this regard, Socrates, the well-known Athenian philosopher of the Ancient World, had this to say when asked what he knew:

'I know only one thing – that I do not know.'

Beyond Science

Buddhism goes beyond modern science in its acceptance of a wider field of knowledge than is allowed by the scientific mind. Buddhism admits knowledge arising from the sense organs as well as personal experiences gained through mental culture. By training and developing a highly concentrated mind, religious experience can be understood and verified. Religious experience is not something which can be understood by conducting experiments in a test-tube or examined under a microscope.

The truth discovered by science is relative and subject to changes, while that found by the Buddha

is final and absolute: the Truth of Dhamma does not change according to time and space. Furthermore, in contrast to the selective theorizing of science, the Buddha encouraged the wise not to cling to theories, scientific or otherwise. Instead of theorizing, the Buddha taught mankind how to live a righteous life so as to discover Ultimate Truths. By living a righteous life, by calming the senses, and by casting off desires, the Buddha pointed the way through which we can discover within ourselves the nature of life. And the real purpose of life can be found.

Practice is important in Buddhism. A person who studies much but does not practise is like one who is able to recite recipes from a huge cookery-book without trying to prepare a single dish. His hunger cannot be relieved by book knowledge alone. Practice is such an important prerequisite of enlightenment that in some schools of Buddhism, such as Zen, practice is put even ahead of knowledge.

The scientific method is outwardly directed, and modern scientists exploit nature and the elements for their own comfort, often disregarding the need to

harmonise with the environment and thereby polluting the world. In contrast, Buddhism is inwardly directed and is concerned with the inner development of man. On the lower level, Buddhism teaches the individual how to adjust and cope with events and circumstances of daily life. At the higher level, it represents the human endeavour to grow beyond oneself through the practice of mental culture or mind development.

Buddhism has a complete system of mental culture concerned with gaining insight into the nature of things which leads to complete self-realization of the Ultimate Truth – *Nibbana*. This system is both practical and scientific, it involves dispassionate observation of emotional and mental states. More like a scientist than a judge, a meditator observes the inner world with mindfulness.

Science Without Religion

Without having moral ideals, science poses a *danger to all mankind*. Science has made the machine which in turn becomes king. The bullet and bomb are gifts of science to the few in power on whom

the destiny of the world depends. Meanwhile the rest of mankind waits in anguish and fear, not knowing when the nuclear weapons, the poisonous gases, the deadly arms — all fruits of scientific research designed to kill efficiently — will be used on them. Not only is science completely unable to provide moral guidance to mankind, it has also fed fuel to the flame of human craving.

Science devoid of morality spells only destruction — it becomes the draconian monster man discovered. And unfortunately, this very monster is becoming more powerful than man himself. Unless man learns to restrain and govern the monster through the practice of religious morality, the monster will soon overpower him. Without religious guidance, science threatens the world with destruction. In contrast, science when coupled with a religion like Buddhism can transform this world into a haven of peace and security and happiness.

Never was there a time when the *co-operation* between science and religion is so desperately needed in the best interest and service of mankind. Religion without science is crippled, while science without religion is blind.

Tribute to Buddhism

The wisdom of Buddhism founded on compassion has the vital role of correcting the dangerous destination modern science is heading for. Buddhism can provide the spiritual leadership to guide scientific research and invention in promoting a brilliant culture of the future. Buddhism can provide worthy goals for scientific advancement which is presently facing a hopeless impasse of being enslaved by its very inventions.

Albert Einstein paid a tribute to Buddhism when he said in his autobiography: *'If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism'*. Buddhism requires no revision to keep it 'up to date' with recent scientific findings. Buddhism need not surrender its views to science because it embraces science as well as goes beyond science. Buddhism is the bridge between religious and scientific thoughts by stimulating man to discover the latent potentialities within himself and his environment. *Buddhism is timeless!*

INTELLECTUALS ON BUDDHISM AND SCIENCE

Buddhism as a Scientific Philosophy

The Buddha discourages the vain search after and the theoretical discussion of absolute notions such as the origin and the end of the universe or of the self. Instead, he demands, first, a study of life and phenomena in respect of their laws. This makes Buddhist Philosophy a scientific or positive philosophy.

(Dr. W.F. Jayasuriya, *“The Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism”*)

Buddhism and Modern Science

“I have often said, and I shall say again and again, that between Buddhism and modern Science there exists a close intellectual bond.”

(Sir Edwin Arnold, *“Light of Asia”*)

Buddhism is a combination of speculative and scientific philosophy

Philosophical conceptions are a product of two factors: one, inherited religious and ethical conceptions; the other called the Scientific. Seen thus, Buddhism is a combination of both speculative and scientific philosophy. It advocates the Scientific Method and pursues that to a finality that may be called the Rationalistic. In it are to be found answers to such questions of interest as "What are mind and matter? Of them which is of greater importance? Is the Universe moving towards a goal? What is man's position? Is there living that is noble?" It takes up where science cannot tread because of the limitations of the latter's physical instruments. Its conquests are those of the mind.

(Bertrand Russell, *"History of Western Philosophy"*)

Buddhism copes with Science

If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.

Albert Einstein (*Autobiography*)

A spiritual science

Buddhism is, on the contrary, a system of thought, a religion, a spiritual science and a way of life, which is reasonable, practical and all-embracing. For 2500 years it has satisfied the spiritual needs of nearly one-third of mankind. It appeals to the West because it has no dogmas, satisfies the reason and the heart alike, insists on self-reliance coupled with tolerance for other points of view, embraces science, religion, philosophy, psychology, ethics and art, and points to man alone as the creator of his present life and sole designer of his destiny.

(Christmas Humpreys, *President, London Buddhist Society*)

Buddhism appeals to the modern mind

If Buddhism appealed to the modern mind it was because it was scientific, empirical and not based on any dogma.

(Dr. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosopher*)

Buddha's views confirmed by science

Indeed, the Buddha's views on phenomena are thus confirmed today by western science. For, whatever our senses may say, the picture presented to us through physics of the phenomenal world, is that there is no solidity, form or substance to be seen anywhere in the universe, but merely a collection of forces in a perpetual state of flux, a momentary 'arising and passing away'.

Buddhism begins where science ends

Science can give no assurance herein. But Buddhism can meet the Atomic Challenge, because the supramundane knowledge of Buddhism begins where science leaves off. And this is clear enough to anyone who has made a study of Buddhism. For, through Buddhist Meditation, the atomic constituents making up matter have been seen and felt, and the sorrow, or unsatisfactoriness or dukkha, of their 'arising and passing away' (dependent on causes) has made itself with what we call a 'soul' or 'atma' — the illusion of self, as it is called in the Buddha's teaching.

Egerton C. Baptist, *"Supreme Science of the Buddha"*.

Transiency of Electro-Magnetism

Here, then, is a beautiful explanation of the puzzling harmony of the Cosmos without recourse to a mysterious unknown — God The Buddha encompassed both gravitational and electro-magnetism in His Doctrine of Anicca — Transiency.

(Egerton C. Baptist, *“Supreme Science of the Buddha”*)

Negative Answers of the Buddha

If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether the electron’s position changes with time, we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say ‘no’. The Buddha has given such answers when interrogated as to the conditions of a man’s self after his death; but they are not familiar answers for the tradition of seventeenth and eighteenth century science.

(J. Robert Oppenheimer, *nuclear scientist*)

Glorious Story

The world will hold you guilty, if you allow that glorious story and that pure and sublime faith (Buddhism) to perish out of the memory of humanity

(Annie Besant, *Founder president of Theosophical Society, India*)

Not a Mere Religion

Buddhism is not properly a religion; it is a system for life and living in a world which is circumscribed with difficulty and beset with suffering. Buddhism is not a religion, if, in scientific terms, we define religion as the mystic experience, the psychic thrill. It is not a religion because it de-emphasizes faith in the unknown and unknowable and it rejects dogmatism.

(Robert F. Spencer, *M.A.Ph.D*)

Buddha and the Salvation

It is not the Buddha who delivers men, but he teaches them to deliver themselves, even as he has

delivered himself. They accept his teaching of the truth, not because it comes from him, but, because of personal conviction, aroused by his words, it arises by the light of their own spirit.

(Dr. Oldenburg, *A German Buddhist scholar*)

Ancient Wisdom of the East

“In the course of their work many psychologists have found, as the pioneer work of C.G. Jung has shown that we are all near Buddhists on our hidden side

To read a little Buddhism is to realise that the Buddhists knew, two thousand five hundred years ago, far more about our modern problems of psychology than they have yet been given credit for. They studied these problems long ago and found the answers too. We are now rediscovering the Ancient Wisdom of the East.”

Dr. Graham Howe, The eminent Harley Street Psychologist. (*Invisible Anatomy*)

STATUS OF WOMEN IN BUDDHISM

K Sri Dhammananda

STATUS OF WOMEN IN BUDDHISM

DISCRIMINATIONS

Discrimination against women is a feature common in all societies. Whether in Africa, America, Asia or Europe, the prejudices and obstacles that woman has to encounter and surmount seemed almost identical. The peculiar disability attached to woman all over the world is based on religious bias. Woman's basic disability originates in religion. Woman is depicted as a temptress and is warned against in almost all religions of the world.

According to certain religious mythological concept, man was introduced as the son of God, but woman never found a similar standing as the daughter of God. Amongst the soul-believers, some held the notion that a soul exists only in man and not in woman. Those who claimed that woman too had a soul would not give credence that her soul could find a place in heaven after her death. Such were the strange beliefs amongst certain religious societies.

Women have also been regarded as the source

of all the sins of the world and that they are blamed for the misfortunes on men in this world and the next. There was also the belief that as women, no salvation could be gained — they had to be reincarnated as men before they are able to gain their salvation.

Certain fanatical religious cults have also prohibited women from reading the religious scriptures. The punishment for doing so was to have their tongues cut out. They were also discouraged from entering places of worship. If they were at all allowed to participate in religious practices, such participation was only confined within their own homes, attending to household religious ceremonies. Such hindrances and obstructions in the matter of moral and spiritual upliftment of women still exist in varying degrees in certain parts of the world, even though many barriers have been removed.

In contrast to such hindrances and bigoted religious practices, Buddhism can certainly claim to have the least discriminatory attitudes against women.

There is not the slightest doubt that the Buddha was the first religious teacher who had given

women equal and unfettered opportunities in the field of spiritual development. Although he had pointed out on several occasions, the natural tendencies and weakness of women, he had also given due credit to their abilities and capabilities. He had truly paved the way for women to lead a full religious life. They were able to develop and purify their minds and realise the bliss of Nibbana in as much as men could. The testimonies of the Theris (Nuns) in the days of the Buddha speak amply of this fact.

The Buddha had opened the gates for the full participation of women in the field of religion by making them eligible for admission to what was known as the Bhikkhuni Sangha — the Order of Nuns which truly opened to women new avenues of culture and social service and ample opportunities for public life. This had brought them to a recognition of their importance to society and greatly enhanced the status of women.

SOCIAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN AT THE TIME OF THE BUDDHA

The social attitude towards women in pre-Buddhist days can be traced from the early Vedic

literature, such as the Rigveda. There is evidence indicating the honour and respect which women received in their homes. In the realm of religion too, they had access to the highest knowledge of the Absolute or Brahma. However, such a liberal attitude towards women changed with the course of time, under the influence and dominance of the priestly caste along with their priestcrafts, animal sacrifices, and other ritualistic practices. New interpretations were given to the scriptures. Women came to be considered as greatly inferior to men — both physically and mentally.

A woman was looked down upon as a mere possession or a thing. Her place was the home, under the complete whims and fancies of her husband. She not only had to perform all the domestic chores, but also had to bring up a large family. Some of the priestly caste Brahmins married and lived with their wives, yet regarded food cooked by women as impure and unfit to eat. A myth was built up — that all women were regarded as sinful and the only way to keep them out of mischief was to keep them occupied endlessly with the task of motherhood and domestic duties.

If a married woman had no children or failed

to produce any male offspring, she might be superseded by a second or third wife or even turned out of the house; for there was the strong belief that there must be a male child for the continuance of family line and the performance of the 'rites of the ancestors'. The traditional belief was that only a son could carry out such rituals which were thought to be very necessary for bringing peace and security to the father and grandfather after their death, otherwise they might return as ghosts to harry the family. Uncertain were the lives of married women. No less uncertainty await the unmarried ones. As marriage was considered a holy sacrament, a young girl who did not marry was badly criticised and despised by society.

In the field of religious practices, the position which they once enjoyed, was denied to them. A woman was believed to be unable to go to heaven through her own merits. She could not worship by herself, and it was believed that she could only reach heaven through unquestioning obedience to her husband, even if he happened to be a wicked person. The food left over by her husband was often the food for the woman.

It was in the midst of such extreme social dis-

crimination and degrading attitudes towards women that the Buddha made his appearance in India. His teachings on the real nature of life and death — about karma and samsaric wanderings, gave rise to considerable changes in the social attitudes towards women in his days.

According to what the Buddha taught about the Law of Karma, one is responsible for one's own action and its consequence. The well-being of a father or grandfather does not depend upon the action of the son or grandson. They were responsible for their own actions. Such enlightened teachings helped to correct the views of many people and naturally reduced the anxiety of women who were unable to produce sons to perform the 'rites of the ancestors'.

In early Buddhist period, an unmarried girl could go along, unabused, contented and adequately occupied in caring for parents and younger brothers and sisters. She might even become the owner of great possessions, of slaves, and rich fields; as did Subha, the daughter of a goldsmith, during the time of the Buddha. But when the Dhamma was taught to her by Mahapajapati, Subha realised the nature of all fleeting pleasures and that 'silver and gold lead neither to peace nor to enlightenment', with the

result that she entered the Order of Buddhist Nuns. This act was a great boon to the unmarried women.

The teachings of the Buddha had done a great deal to wipe off many superstitious beliefs and meaningless rites and rituals including animal sacrifices, from the minds of many people. When the true nature of life and death and the natural phenomena governing the universe were revealed to them, wisdom and understanding arose. This in turn helped to arrest and correct the prevailing social injustices and prejudices that were rampant against women in the days of the Buddha thus enabling women to lead their own way of life.

WOMAN' NATURE

Despite the fact that the Buddha had elevated the status of women, he was practical in his observations and advice given from time to time in that he realised the social and physiological differences that existed between men and women. These were depicted in the Anguttara Nikaya and Samyutta Nikaya. It was clearly mentioned that a man's duty is his unending quest for knowledge, the improvement and stabilisation of his skill and craftsmanship, and

and stabilisation of his skills and craftsmanship, and dedication to his work and ability to find the wherewithal for the maintenance and sustenance of his family. On the other hand it was stated, as a matter of fact, that it was the woman's duty to look after the home, and to look after her husband.

The Anguttara Nikaya contained some valuable advice which the Buddha had given to young girls prior to their marriage. Realising that there was bound to be difficulties with the new in-laws, the girls were enjoined to give every respect to their mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law, serving them lovingly as they would their own parents. They were requested to honour and respect their husband's relatives and friends, thus creating a congenial and happy atmosphere in their new homes. They were also advised to study and understand their husband's nature, ascertain their activities, character and temperament, and to be useful and co-operative at all times in their new home. They should be polite, kind and watchful in their relationship with the servants and should safe-guard their husband's earnings and see to it that all household expenditures are properly regularised. Such advice given by the Buddha more than twenty five centuries ago stand good even today.

The handicaps and drawbacks under which a woman had to undergo in life were also clearly indicated. The suffering and agony to be borne by a woman in leaving her family after her marriage, and the difficulties and problems she had to encounter in trying to accommodate herself in a new environment, were the trials and tribulations she had to bear. In addition to these problems, a woman is also subjected to physiological pain and sufferings during her menstrual periods, pregnancy and child-birth. These are natural phenomena depicting the differential handicaps and circumstances prevailing between a man and a woman.

Although in certain sections of the Tripitaka, some caustic comments were made on the wiles and behaviour of a woman, the Buddha in the Samyutta Nikaya, did bring forth many redeeming features in that, under certain circumstances, women are considered more discerning and wise than men and that women are also considered capable of attaining perfection or sainthood after treading the noble Eight-fold path.

The Buddha's attitude towards women can also be seen when the news of the birth of a daughter was brought to his friend, King Kosala. The King was

displeased at the news as he expected a son, but the Buddha, unlike any other religious teacher paid a glowing tribute to women and mentioned certain characteristics that adorn a woman in the following words:-

“Some women are indeed better (than men)
Bring her up, O Lord of men. There are
women who are wise, virtuous, who have
high regard for mother-in-law, and who are
chaste.

To such a noble wife may be born a valiant
son,
a Lord of Realms, who rule a Kingdom.”

In revealing the nature of women, the Buddha had pointed out not only their weaknesses, but also their potentialities and abilities. Even though some of his statements may appear rather unpleasant, one will find, through careful observation, that what the Buddha had said about women in days gone by generally still hold good today. Although there exist in most countries more enlightened and fairer attitudes, and educational and independent career opportunities are open to women, the unpleasant experience a woman bears, the powers she possess, the dis-

crimination she has to put up with and her fears and jealousies of a rival, still prevail.

BUDDHA'S ADVICE TO MARRIED WOMEN

In advising women about their role in married life, the Buddha appreciated that the peace and harmony of a home rested largely on a woman's shoulder. His advice was realistic and practical when he quoted a good number of day-to-day characteristics which a woman should or should not emulate. On diverse occasions, the Buddha counselled that a wife:-

- (a) should not harbour evil thoughts against her husband;
- (b) should not be cruel, harsh or domineering;
- (c) should not be a spendthrift but should be economical and live within her means;
- (d) should zealously guard and save her husband's property and hard-earned earnings;
- (e) should always be virtuous and chaste in mind and action;

- (f) should be faithful and harbour no thought of any adulterous acts;
- (g) should be refined in speech and polite in action;
- (h) should be kind, industrious and hard-working;
- (i) should be thoughtful and compassionate towards her husband and her attitude should equate that of a mother loving and protecting her son;
- (j) should be modest and respectful;
- (k) should be cool, calm and understanding — serving not only as a wife but also as a friend and adviser to her husband when need arises.

In the days of the Buddha, other religious teachers had also spoken on the duties and obligations of a wife towards her husband — stressing particularly on the duty of a wife bearing an off-spring for her husband, rendering faithful service and providing conjugal happiness and heavenly bliss. This view is also shared by Confucianism. However, although the duties of a wife towards the husband were laid down in the Confucian code of discipline, it did not stress

the duties and obligations of the husband towards the wife. The teachings of the Buddha did not have such bias towards the husbands. In the Sigalovada Sutta, the Buddha clearly mentioned the duties of a husband towards the wife and vice versa.

A husband should be faithful, courteous and not despising. It is the husband's duty to hand over authority to his wife and from time to time, provide her with adornments.

Other useful advice was given to women on different occasions and under different circumstances.

ADVICE TO BEAUTY CONSCIOUS WOMEN

For the vain and beauty conscious, the Buddha had taught the lesson of impermanence. Khema, the beautiful consort of King Bimbisara, was at first reluctant to see the Buddha as she had heard that the Buddha used to refer to external beauty in rather disparaging terms. One day she paid a casual visit to the monastery merely to enjoy the scenery of the place. Gradually she was attracted to the hall where

the Buddha was preaching. The Buddha, through his psychic powers, read her thoughts, and created a vision of a young lady, standing in front of her. Khema was admiring her beauty when the Buddha transformed the created image from youth to middle age and subsequently to old age, till it finally fell on the ground with broken teeth, grey hair and wrinkled skin. This transformation caused Khema to realise the vanity of external beauty and to appreciate the fleeting nature of life. She pondered: "Has such a body come to be wrecked like that? Then so will my body also." With this, realisation dawned upon her. She subsequently attained Arahatsip, and with the King's consent, she entered the Order of Bhikkhuni.

ADVICE TO EMOTIONAL WOMEN

To women who were unduly emotional and grief-stricken on the loss of their beloved ones, the Buddha spoke on the inevitability of death, as enunciated in the Four Noble Truths, and quoted various parables to drive in the point.

To Visakha, a deeply emotional and affectio-

nate grandmother who lost her grand-daughter, the Buddha consoled her as following:-

“From affection springs grief,
from affection springs fear,
for one who is wholly free from affection,
there is no grief, much less fear.”

On another occasion, when Kisagotami who had lost her only infant son, approached the Buddha to bring back her son to life, she was requested to bring some mustard seed from a home where no death had taken place. The lady could find the mustard seed but she could not find a family where death had not previously occurred; hence realisation came to her that death did not afflict her child alone but was a common phenomena to all living beings.

Patacara was another tragic case. She has lost her two children, her husband, her parents and her brother under very tragic circumstances. She was mad with grief and was running about in the streets. Upon meeting the Buddha, she was consoled as follows:

“There are no sons for one’s protection, neither father nor even kinsmen for one who is over-

come by death. No protection is to be found among kinsmen.

Realising this fact, let the virtuous and wise person swiftly-clear the way that leads to Nibbana."

Hearing the Buddha's consoling words, and appreciating the nature of life, she attained the first stage of sainthood and entered the Order of Nuns.

REAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR WOMEN

The establishment of the Bhikkhuni Sangha-the Order of Nuns, in the 5th year of the Buddha's ministry, really paved the way for full religious freedom for women in the days of the Buddha. It was a splendid success. There arose many eminent nuns who shone brilliantly in the study and practice of the Dhamma. In the eyes of the world, Buddhism was raised to a very high level. The Psalms of the Sisters (Therigatha) containing 77 verses by individual nuns is one of the prides of Buddhist literature.

The Buddha did not place any restrictions on the nuns in the matter of teaching and preaching of

the Dhamma. The Bhikkhuni Order produced a remarkable number of brilliant preachers and exponents of the Dhamma e.g. Sukha, Patacara, Khema, Dhammadinna and Mah Pajapau (foster mother of the Buddha). Buddhism never shared the Brahmin's view that a son was essential for the father's passage to heaven. Daughters became quite as good as sons and marriage was no longer a compulsory necessity. Women under Buddhism had the liberty to lead an independent life and go about their own business. The Buddha by granting women an active share in the religious life, also helped to raise their status in secular life as well.

However the admission of women into the Order was a step too advanced for the period and became short-lived. Whenever an innovation or improvement was in advance of the thinking and development of a people during a particular era, the people were unable to adapt themselves to the improved conditions and tended to regress back to the society that they were used to. They failed to master the situation. Hostile propaganda by the Brahmins who found their caste system undermined and privileges giving way was also a factor that caused the decline of the Order.

In Sri Lanka, the Order of Nuns flourished till 1017 A. C. in the reign of King Mahinda IV. It then disappeared and was not revived again. But the Order of Nuns was introduced into China by Sinhalese nuns, and still exists there as well as in Japan today. However in the Mahayana tradition they occupy a subordinate place, and are by no means on par with the monks.

TOWARDS EQUALITY AND FREEDOM

With the advent of the modern era in the 19th and 20th century, a far cry from the days of the Buddha, women's emancipation and quest for freedom and equality had achieved tremendous strides, particularly in the West. This was the result of modern trends and modern education for women in all seats of higher learning.

Lead by Susan B. Anthony, the American pioneer unfurled the flag of equality for women in the year 1848 — just slightly over 130 years ago. Since then, the movement and struggle, with wider objectives had forged ahead all over the world under the inspired leadership of many capable and leading

pioneer women and women's organisations. They believed that women had a role to play in patriotic fellowship with their menfolk in contributing to the building of a better world through building a better society and country.

Since 1848, the world has witnessed innumerable popular organised movements for equal educational opportunities, equal political rights and economic equality for women. In the West, the status of women was enhanced by the conditions generated by the industrial revolution, humanitarian movements and women's movement for equality. In Asia and other countries which were not so industrially advanced, the change was brought about by reformers with a strong religious background.

During the last fifty to sixty years, the steady process of increasing women's participation in the economic, social as well as the political life of their countries had been forging ahead steadily. The success achieved by women in the twentieth century can only be described as phenomenal. Many women had achieved success in their various fields of endeavour — in social science, in business, in economics and in the political field. In some countries, women had even succeeded in capturing the top most political

appointments — as Prime Ministers of their land — although ironically enough, in certain countries, women have yet to be given the franchise — the right to vote!

International action to raise the status of women began in a small way with the defunct League of Nations, after the first World War. Subsequently the United Nations Charter went further to grant the principles of equality and freedom to all women. An organ of the United Nations, the Commission on the status of women, probed the question of discrimination based on sex and deliberated on questions touching on the political rights of women, equal pay for equal work, the status of women in common law, the nationality of married women, educational and economic opportunities for women, technical assistance and participation by women.

Though much had been accomplished through women's suffragettes and international organisations such as those sponsored by the United Nations in relation to greater women's participation in the social, economic and political fields, it is pertinent to observe that the question of real freedom for women had yet to be achieved.

Real freedom is the freedom that is free from all forms of bondage. It can be achieved only through the proper spiritual development and purification of one's own mind — purging and cleansing oneself from all taints of greed, hatred and delusion. No amount of public debates, demonstrations and universal charters could bring true freedom — except through one's own diligence and heedfulness by the regular practice of meditation as taught by the Buddha.

For promoting the cause of women, the Buddha can be considered as the first emancipator of women and promoter of a democratic way of life. It is to the eternal credit of the Buddha-Dhamma that women were not despised and looked down but were given equal status with men in their spiritual endeavour on the way to gain wisdom and Nibbana.

**OPEN TO ALL IS THE GATEWAY TO
COMPLETE DELIVERANCE.**

SELF RELIANCE

By Ourselves is
Evil done
By Ourselves We
pain endure
By Ourselves We
cease from
wrong



By Ourselves become We pure
No one saves Us but Ourselves
No one can and no one may
We Ourselves must walk the Path
Buddhas merely show the Way.

THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

Dr.K.Sri Dhammananda

THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

By Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

The aim of this article is to assist in promoting a better understanding of religion, religious tolerance and its deep underlying meaning from the Buddhist point of view and to understand how Buddhism regards other religions.

The meaning of religion is a discipline which enables a person to uphold and respect one's own beliefs without in any way being disrespectful or discourteous towards other religions. To this end, we must establish mutual understanding, mutual cooperation with friendliness towards other religions to achieve religious harmony.

People always talk of religious tolerance and its importance but few, if any, ever pinpoint a practical way of achieving this religious tolerance. It is our intention that the reader of this article would have better understanding of religious tolerance and would thereby endeavour to promote religious tolerance. We should try to eradicate our so-called superiority

complex, our mutual suspicion, our religious prejudices and our selfish motives, for the common good and upliftment of our respective religions. Also, we must be careful about what we mean by 'tolerance'. Tolerance implies 'putting up with' something we may dislike. We cannot simply tolerate other religions and maintain our superior attitude with regard to our own. We must be able to deeply respect another view although we may not agree with it.

All fellow-religionists are working for the common cause of human emancipation and enlightenment. The search for emancipation and enlightenment is the search for Truth. Unfortunately, in our very midst, there are many ludicrous religious practices and beliefs which are depicted or passed off as the Truth, when in fact they are far from being the Truth. As true, intelligent religious followers we must have the courage and conviction to admit what is evidently a misconception and try to rectify it to conform to science and reason to meet the demands of Truth. We should be failing in our duty if we try to cling on to something which we know is not the Truth. We will even be wrong, if in the practice of religious tolerance, we tolerate

wrong beliefs without pointing out the failings or inadequacies which do not conform to Truth. In seeking Truth we should discard our competitive attitudes and unite to work hand-in-hand to achieve our noble aim of religious harmony for the well-being of mankind.

Although the Buddha pointed out that there was no religious value in many of the practices in India during his time, he had the courtesy to advise his followers to support the Brahmins and other monks irrespective of their religion provided of course they were sincere and harmless religious people. The Buddha advised his followers not to hurt or to cause injury to a Sramana (monk) or a Brahmin. He recognized monks and Brahmins as religious people. The Buddha even said that when a person deceives a Brahmin or a monk or pauper, by telling a lie, this can become a cause of the downfall of the person. Thus in advising his followers in this manner the Buddha treated people of all persuasions without any discrimination.

The aim of Buddhism is to guide everyone to lead a noble life without harming anyone,

to cultivate humane qualities in order to maintain human dignity, to radiate all-embracing kindness without any discrimination, and to train the mind to avoid evil and to purify the mind to gain peace and happiness.

Buddhism is a religion which teaches people to 'live and let live'. In the history of the world, there is no evidence to show that Buddhists have interfered or done any damage to any other religion in any part of the world for the purpose of introducing their religion. Buddhists do not regard the existence of other religions as a hindrance to worldly progress and peace. Instead of converting the followers of other religions into our religion, Buddhists can encourage others to practise their own religions, provided that they promote the well being of all living beings.

The Buddha's message was an invitation to all to join the fold of universal brotherhood to work in strength and harmony for the welfare and happiness of mankind. He had no chosen people, and he did not regard himself as a chosen one either.

The Buddha's first missionaries were Arahantas – the Perfect and Holy Ones. They were noble human beings who by the sheer effort of their renunciation and mental training had gained Perfection. Before sending out these disciples, he advised them in the following manner:

‘Go ye, O Bhikkhus, and wander forth for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, in compassion for the world; for the good, for the gain, for the welfare of gods and men. Proclaim, O Bhikkhus, the sublime doctrine, preach ye a life of holiness, perfect and pure.’

The Buddha was impartial even regarding his own teachings. Advising his followers to regard the Teachings as a raft which must be used merely to cross the river, he urged them to use their own minds and intelligence to discern the truth. On one occasion, a group of young people called the Kalamas approached him and complained that they were confused because each teacher they went to claimed that he alone was privy to the truth while everyone else was a charlatan or a liar. They asked the Buddha to teach them how

to recognize a true religion. His reply has often been described by impartial thinkers as the Charter of Religious Freedom, 'Now Kalamas, do not ye go by hearsay, nor by what is handed down by others, nor by what people say, nor by what is stated on the authority of your traditional teachings. Do not go by reasoning, nor by inferring, nor by argument, nor from reflection on and approval of an opinion, nor out of respect, thinking a recluse must be deferred to. But, Kalamas, when you know, of yourselves: *These teachings are not good; they are blameworthy; they are condemned by the wise: these teachings, when followed up and put in practice, conduce to loss and suffering* – then reject them' (Anguttara-Nikaya, I. 188. Woodward's translation).

On another occasion the Buddha was approached by an extremely wealthy person called Upali. This man was the follower of another religion and he wanted to join the Buddha but was unsure of how to treat his former teachers. The Buddha clearly stated that he was to treat them with the same respect as before and to continue to support them even if he no longer followed them. Throughout his life

the Buddha urged people to respect all religious people in spite of the differences of opinion between them.

The Buddha took this tolerant attitude to all other religions, but he himself had no intention of founding a religion. His experience of Enlightenment was the culmination of an intensely long period of self training and mind purification. Although he had gone to many teachers to find the answers to the problem of existence, he was dissatisfied. He then decided to seek within himself for the answers. He learnt the futility of extreme asceticism and the ignobility of extreme self-gratification. Rejecting these extremes he discovered the Truth of the Middle Way. He learnt that the body must be cared for so that the mind will have the correct conditions for sustained and concentrated thought.

CONCEPT OF GOD

It is interesting to note here the Buddha's attitude to the concept of godhead. He did not reject the belief in one god or many gods. He accepted that the condition of a god is that of a

being who through moral development is reborn in a happy state. There are many levels of this state, loosely translated as 'heavens'. The beings who inhabit these realms are called 'devas' which literally means 'beings of light'. There is a hierarchy whereby those with very strong karmas are born in the highest realms while those with relatively weaker karmas are born in the lower planes. They live for immensely long periods of time, but they are not eternal, for they must eventually die and be reborn in other states when their store of good karma is expended. This happens because these gods are not perfect.

The gods are powerful and can help human beings in many ways and are entitled to our respect and devotion. However they are incapable of effecting our salvation. They are capable of anger, revenge, pride and even jealousy. Rather than relying on gods, each being must work to purify his or her own mind, through intense self-effort. Not even a Buddha can give salvation. The Dharma was taught by the Buddha as a means for us to gain our salvation. One must study the Teachings, understand them and above all PRACTISE

them sincerely to the best of our ability.

Belief in the gods, therefore is not condemned by the Buddha. They do exist, but while we may appeal to them for help in satisfying some of our desires, we must rely only on ourselves to effect salvation by purifying the mind. Those who believe in a creator God condemn non believers as sinners and discriminate against them although they lead a noble life. Buddhists however do not condemn the believers of God as sinners although buddhists do not agree with certain beliefs and practices that they maintain.

It follows from this that Buddhists can take a very tolerant view of other beliefs. First they are encouraged to recognize the teachings in other religions which conform to their own beliefs and secondly to recognize the gods in other religions and pay them due respect. It must be stressed here that this does not mean a blind acceptance of everything that is believed by everyone else. The Kalama Sutta referred to earlier insists '*when you know, of yourselves that these teachings are good etc*'. This means we must be discerning and guard against

accepting 'false views'. But Buddhists are never allowed to condemn others because at all times they must practise compassion and understanding and respect for others.

ADOPT AND ADAPT

The Buddha was even ready to accept other views if they were useful to explain the reality of the Four Noble Truths. According to Ven. Sangharakshita,

‘Though the Buddha rejected in the most categorical manner a great many of the beliefs and practices current in his time, references to which will be found scattered all over the pages of the scriptures, it should not be concluded that his attitude towards contemporary trends of thought was entirely negative, much less still unsympathetic or hostile – words which have no meaning in relation to a Fully Enlightened and Wholly Compassionate One. He was as ready to accept as to reject; in fact he was more ready to reject than to accept. For he knew that a positive method of teaching was more appealing, more likely to find entrance into the hearts and minds of his audience, than a purely

negative and destructive one, however correct and logical the latter might be. Consequently we find the Buddha constantly putting – if we may be permitted a metaphor which he probably would not have used, even if he had known it, of putting old wine in new bottles. He does not condemn the practice of ceremonial ablution, for instance, so much as insist that real purification comes by bathing, not in the Ganges as people thought, but in the cleansing waters of the Dharma. He does not ask the brahmin to give up tending the Sacred Fire, with which so many ancient traditions and so much religious emotion were bound up, but to remember that the true fire burns within, and that it feeds not on any material object but solely on the fuel of meditation. These examples of the Buddha's capacity to utilize Indian traditional practices for the purposes of his own Teaching could be paralleled by a hundred others from the same canonical sources. Though self-torture had been definitely rejected as a means to Enlightenment, he permitted thirteen ascetic practices, called dhutangas, out of hundreds of similar ones, to the members of his Order, not because he considered them necessary, but because there was a popular demand for them

and because they were in any case not positively harmful.'

'This spirit of adaptation and assimilation was one of the factors which enabled Buddhism to spread so rapidly and easily, and with the minimum of opposition, among races and peoples whose traditions and cultural backgrounds were in many ways quite different from those of India.' (*Sangharakshita, Survey of Buddhism. p 81*)

As Ven. Sangharakshita puts it so eloquently, Buddhism adopted and adapted to any culture it encountered as it spread all over Asia in the first thousand years of its history. Buddhism never sought to replace other religions wherever it spread. Rather it accepted anything 'not positively harmful' (like killing), in other cultures and by assimilation made these practices its own. For example Buddhism did not condemn the belief in tree spirits which the pre Buddhist Thais and Sri Lankans had, but allowed them to continue because it ensured a respect and love for nature. As a result Buddhism fostered the development of unique forms of culture so that we have today Chinese

Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism which are culturally distinct but which all agree with the basic doctrinal teachings. In fact we can even see the beginnings of a new Malaysian brand of Buddhism which is quite distinct from the Buddhism practised in traditionally Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.

WHAT THE BUDDHA WANTED TO INTRODUCE

The Buddha was only concerned about showing the path to ultimate happiness. He was not concerned with founding a religion in his name.

The Buddha wanted to show people the difference between good and evil, he wanted to teach humans how to lead a happy, peaceful, and righteous way of life. He never advised his disciples to convert people from one religion to another. His idea of conversion was to introduce a righteous, noble and religious way of life. In fact he said that the greatest miracle one could perform was to convert a bad person into a good one.

The Buddha did not criticise or condemn any religion. He only wanted to enlighten the people by showing them the correct path to avoid superstitious and meaningless practices in the name of religion. He wanted human beings to behave decently after seeing things-as-they-really are. There may be certain age-old traditions and customs maintained by people and incorporated into their religions but some of them are out of date today because scientists have discovered many things in this world which people could not understand earlier.

THE TRUE RELIGION

On the question of what constitutes a true religion, the Buddha has given a liberal answer, stating that wherever the teachings of the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS and the NOBLE EIGHT FOLD PATHS could be found, and where one can find genuine followers who have gained spiritual development, therein lies the true religion. He did not say that Buddhism is the only true religion in this world, but exhorted people to accept and respect truth wherever truth was to be found. This means that we need

not ignore the reasonable teachings of the other religions. Such an attitude clearly shows that the Buddha never had any prejudice towards other religions, nor did he try to monopolise religious truth. He wanted to point out one thing – the TRUTH and all his teachings are based on the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS – that of SUFFERING or unsatisfactoriness, its CAUSE, its CESSATION and the WAY leading to its cessation. The Truths are a reality which exist wherever there are human beings.

Whenever the Buddha advised his disciples to do something or to keep away from something, he always asked them to do so, not only for their own welfare and happiness, but also for the welfare and happiness of others. He said, 'if it is good for you and others, then do it; on the other hand, if it is bad for you and for others, do not do it.' He did not introduce them as commandments or religious laws but as advices. He also did not create fear or temptation through Buddhism.

As a social reformer, the Buddha discovered the deepest roots of human suffering – GREED, HATRED and DELUSION, which are

deeply fixed in the mind. Therefore it is only through mind that true reform can be effected. Reforms imposed upon the external world by compulsion or fear can only last for a short while, but those that spring from the transformation of a person's inner consciousness and understanding are more durable.

The evil tendencies towards GREED, HATRED and DELUSION must eventually be overcome and substituted by the forces of generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom. It is only through such mental purification that peace and happiness can be effectively brought about through religion. And to do this one must exert oneself mindfully: mere prayer and ritual are not enough.

FIRST MISSIONARY RELIGION

Buddhism became the first missionary religion the world has seen. Nearly two thousand three hundred years ago, Buddhism expanded beyond India through the noble efforts of the Indian Emperor Asoka. The historian, H.G. Wells, inspired by the greatness

of Asoka, says: 'amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousness and serenity and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Asoka shines, and almost alone, a star.'

For he, the Emperor who ruled India (about 305 b.c.e. – 268 b.c.e.) at the height of his thirst for worldly power, renounced the sword of violence and devoted much of his time for the upliftment of Buddhism and Buddhist culture. He sent out Buddhist missionaries, including his own son and daughter throughout the length and breadth of the then known world, to convey the peace message of the Buddha. True to the noble tradition of the Buddha, he never neglected to advise these missionaries not to condemn or to run down any other religion while they preached Buddhism. This advice was engraved on an Asoka pillar in Brahmi characters – the ruins of which can still be seen today in India.

The following statements in the Edict says:-

'One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but

one should honour others' religion for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honours his own religions and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religions, thinking 'I will glorify my own religion,' but on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely. So concord is good: 'Let all listen and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others.'

The people of Asia have much cause to be grateful to this great monarch. As a ruler he did his duty to support every existing religion without any discrimination. That is why he is honoured today while many others who tried to dominate the whole world by adopting cruel methods were ignored by people.

RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Religious principles are intended for the whole of mankind. If any particular section of humanity does not follow the great virtues

taught by religion – such as kindness, patience, tolerance and understanding, it would be difficult for others to live peacefully.

It is quite natural for cunning and cruel people to take advantage of any kind of virtue. The religionists of today, must bear in mind that those who fight and shed blood in the name of religion, do not follow religious principles and do not serve the cause of humanity. They fight for their own personal gain or power by using the name of religion. Those who truly practise a religion have no grounds to fight. They should settle their problems in a peaceful manner. A true religion never encourages any form of violence under any circumstance. At the same time, racial discrimination should not arise when we practise our respective religions. Buddhists can live and work with other religionists without any discrimination. Not only that, Buddhists have never shed blood in the name of religion amongst their different denominations or with other religions.

Today because of the atrocities that have been done and are still continuing in the name of religion, many people have become

disillusioned at the mention of the very word, 'religion'. Materialism, hypocrisy and fanaticism masquerading under the guise of religion have caused great injustices in the history of mankind. The true religious values are rapidly disappearing from the minds of men as they run in search of the occult and the mystical. The established great religions of the world are breaking into myriads of forms while on the other hand some people are going all out to ridicule religion. The time has come for religionists of today to get together to introduce religious values in their proper perspective, instead of merely arguing and quarrelling over the differences of religious ideologies and mythologies.

Religion should not be confined to worshipping and praying only. Religion is not a means for lip service only but a practical medium for man to act harmlessly, to be of service to others, to teach everyone to be good and to gain liberation, peace and real happiness. Each person has three natures: The Animal, the Human and the sublime Divine natures. The purpose of religion is to help human beings realize their noble divine nature.

Different religions may have different beliefs and views regarding the beginning and the end of life, as well as different interpretations regarding the nature of ultimate salvation. But we should not bring forward such discordant issues to create conflict, confrontation, clashes, hatred and misunderstanding.

SEE TRUTH IN OTHERS

The period during the time of the Buddha in India was one of great religious and spiritual activities. One of the discourses of the Buddha, '*Brahmajala Sutra*' records that there were six main religious schools of thought which were again subdivided into 62 sects. These ranged from eternalism and belief in a single Creator God to nihilism where no hereafter was postulated. While the Buddha rejected the dogmatic stand taken by these religions (that they alone were right and all others were wrong) he was quite prepared to see that there were some elements of Truth (the Dharma) in each of them. He urged his followers to recognize the truth taught in other religions but to be vigilant and discern any 'false view' in these teachings. For example his foster mother who had become

a nun was given this advice on how to differentiate between correct and false religions: He advised her that to judge a religion one must test whether it reduces passions or increases them, whether it leads to freedom of the spirit rather than enslavement of the self, whether it increases greed or reduces greed, whether it makes people want to do good. If all the positive aspects are encouraged, then it is to be recognized as a true religion.

Truth does not belong to any particular religion. Even those who do not claim any religion also know how to appreciate the truth. There are more than enough common virtues for religionists to introduce in theory and practice in the name of religion, so that people may lead a righteous, peaceful and cultured way of life. There is no need for us to belittle and castigate one another. If we do so, we would only pave the way for the anti-religious groups who are waiting to ridicule and condemn all religions. We should not behave in such a way as to show our hostile attitude to our co-religionists. If we do so, people will say that religions encourage mankind to be divided.

WAR AND AGRESSION

It is a matter of historical truth that throughout the 25 centuries of its existence there has never been even one instance of religious persecution or war waged in the name of Buddhism. Of course, people calling themselves Buddhists have fought other people, and killed and pillaged, but it has never been for the purpose of spreading Buddhism or for the glory of Buddhism. The most outstanding example of this is H.H. the Dalai Lama who has struggled against the Chinese occupation of his homeland, but who has consistently insisted that he 'loves his Chinese brothers and sisters' and that he will only use non-violent means to regain the country. In this connection we can quote Professor Rhys Davids who 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 reigned supreme, of any persecution by the Buddhists of the followers of any other faith'. Buddhism was thus able to diffuse itself through a great variety of cultures throughout the world.

The Emperor Asoka who conquered almost all of the Indian sub-continent with unimaginable ruthlessness and cruelty. However after his last battle against the Kalingas where more than 100,000 men, women and children were mercilessly slaughtered, he turned to Buddhism and was completely transformed from Candasaoka (cruel Asoka) to Dhammasoka (righteous Asoka). He turned from violence to compassion.

Buddhists are not forbidden to give due respect to other religious teachers, nor are they restricted in visiting places of worship and attending religious services, other than Buddhism. They can show their full cooperation while maintaining their basic Buddhist principles.

Buddhism encourages cooperation and understanding amongst the various religious denominations. From the Buddhist point of view, religious labels are not the most important aspect for people to be considered religious, but any person leading a respectable and harmless way of life can be regarded as religious.

Those who find faults and criticise Buddhism can only do so at a very superficial level. They may criticise the traditional practices and customs but not the teachings as taught by the Buddha, as the religious principles taught by the Buddha are good for all time. They can be tried out by anyone who wishes to test them.

The methods used to introduce the teachings of the Buddha are peaceful and reasonable. The Buddha made his appeal through reason and experience. The teachings were presented with clear and impressive simplicity and kept free from religious and national narrowness and fanaticism. They have produced clear and sober-minded people. This method of presentation cleared doubts and removed superstitious beliefs. Thus did the teachings of the Buddha convert the hearts and minds of the earnest seekers of truth. The Buddhist attitude of tolerance and understanding convinced many great thinkers, philosophers, rationalists, free-thinkers and even agnostics to appreciate Buddhism as a peaceful way of life devoid of fear and superstition.

According to the Buddha, men are divided among themselves because of their strong sense of ego. When this is subdued by seeing the essential emptiness of a being, healthy human relationships will develop. The search for peace and a harmonious way of life, therefore begins from within and not from the outside.

An understanding of this central teaching of Buddhism is very important to the discussion of our topic. With this understanding we see that all human activities, including religion are mind-made. The Buddha said that his teachings must be seen as a raft to cross a river; once we have used it to get to the other bank, we need not be burdened with it to climb the mountain, which is our real destination. Zen Buddhists say the teachings simply represent the finger pointing to the moon, they are not the moon itself. So the religion of Buddhism which developed from the Teachings is merely a convenient vessel to help us reach our real destination. It is not the Ultimate Reality. Since therefore everything, including religion is mind-made and lacking in any ultimate reality there is no need to argue about the superiority of

one's beliefs over that of another's.

UNITE TOGETHER

If we, the religionists of today cannot get together to work in harmony without discrimination or hostility towards one another, the peace that we talk of would only remain as a dream.

As sincere and true co-religionists, let us join hands to consolidate our efforts to eradicate all that is controversial and discriminatory in our teachings and do our utmost to introduce spiritual values which are common in our respective religions for the good and well-being of all mankind, irrespective of race or creed. We should all remember that religion exists for the good of mankind and that it should not be misused fanatically in any way for personal gain or self-glorification.

Let all religionists unite to condemn religious militarism. Let them unite to stop all the brutality and manslaughter in the name of war.

Let them unite to give freedom to man to find a religion according to his or her own conviction.

Let them unite to give up religious monopoly. Let them unite not to use religion in the market place to convert others by adopting unethical or questionable methods.

Let them unite to respect the other person's religious beliefs and practices as long as these beliefs and practices are harmless and do not mislead the public.

Let them unite to wipe out the challenging attitude of unhealthy religious competition or without adopting any aggressive attitude.

Let all religionists unite to eliminate the various vices and immoral practices that are common in our modern society.

Let them also unite to introduce the moderate way of life amongst their

followers and advise them not to go too extremes.

Dr. L.M. Joshi of Punjab University says: 'The unity among the religions of mankind, if and when achieved, will be one of the greatest blessings on this earth. Certainly we cannot bring about this unity by mystifying or misinterpreting their differences in origins and doctrines. We can perhaps contribute towards achieving harmony among the followers of different faiths by impartially and respectfully studying their doctrines, beliefs and practices.' Like the bee gathering honey from different flowers, without harming them, the wise one sees only the good in all religions and accepts the essence of the truth of the different teachings. For example:

- (1) Buddhism says, 'Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.'
- (2) Taoism says, 'Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss.'
- (3) Christianity says, 'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'

- (4) Islam says, 'Do unto all men as you would they should do unto you, and reject for others what you would reject for yourself.'
- (5) Hinduism says, 'Let no one do to others what he would not have done to himself.'

The founders of each religion had as their basic aim the unity of mankind – to foster harmony, goodwill and understanding among all the people of the world.

Following in their footsteps various religious leaders have also sought to develop this deep respect for the beliefs of other people. Unfortunately, however, certain followers of every religion, for their own selfish reasons and due to their intolerance and narrow-mindedness, have gone against the real essence of Religion and have created chaos, suspicion, discrimination and hostility.

Earlier on we noted that the Buddha's Enlightenment arose as a result of his discovering the Middle Path, which is the rejection of Eternalism and Nihilism, but finding a compromise between these two extremes.

However the Middle Path can be applied to every other aspect of living as well. Moderation and Contentment are seen as the bases of a happy life in this existence. The avoidance of extremes and the respect for other perspectives is applied in the everyday behavior of Buddhists all over the world. For example there are very few objections to participation in the rituals of other religions provided they are not harmful, as when it involves the killing of animals. Buddhists are quite free to go to Church, Temple or Mosque because in all these places the mind can become concentrated and free from evil thoughts. Buddhists are quite tolerant when it comes to mixed marriages, seeing them as a purely social function, invented by man to serve a mundane need. Marriage has nothing to do with one's spiritual development, so the marriage to a person of another faith is not seen as a transgression of any religious law.

In conclusion we can say that the Buddhist attitude towards other religions is one of tolerance and respect. It arises from the Buddhist perception of the mundane nature of all human activity. The transcendence of these activities gives rise to spiritual development

where religious differences lose their boundaries.

We earnestly hope that by realizing these facts mankind will one day unite as religious brothers to work for the wellbeing of all. In the final analysis, let us remember that respect for the religion of another person springs from the confidence one has in the intrinsic strength of his or her own religion.

Freedom to Practise Religion in Malaysia

It is with a deep sense of pride that we can again reflect on the high degree of religious tolerance and understanding that we maintain in Malaysia. Given its extremely complex ethnic and cultural set up, one would expect religious differences to play a dominant role in our social and political affairs. Surprisingly this has not happened. Although there have been attempts to highlight religious problems every now and then, commonsense and goodwill have always prevailed, making Malaysia the envy of other nations the world over.

Besides the unhealthy attitude adopted by some over zealous missionaries to convert the followers of other religions through their unethical and aggressive methods, we can say that generally there is little discrimination among religions in Malaysia.

To ensure that this atmosphere prevails, Malaysians have preferred to discuss their complaints about their dissatisfaction regarding religious matters between the leaders of the different religions rather than going out on the streets. We must make mention the important role played by the BCCHS – the Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism. This council has brought up many grievances to the government which on its part has generally been receptive and understanding. Of course it is too much to claim that all problems can be easily settled, but at least people have a forum at which their views can be heard.

Another such group is the Insaf which is a group including all major religious groups – Islam, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Sikh and some other religious groups under the umbrella

of Pure Life Society which are concerned with fostering greater understanding and respect towards the different beliefs.

Mention must also be made of FIRE, a Catholic movement devoted to Inter Religious Empowerment. It actively promotes ecumenism not only among the different Christian sects, but also tries to reach out to non Christian religions, something quite unthinkable a few decades ago. This group tries to bring different religions, together to prove that we can have different beliefs and yet share our spirituality. Their efforts are to be greatly commended and supported. If we can finally arrive at the day when we agree to respect our different religions without trying to convert others then we would have really gained full spiritual maturity. Let Malaysia show the rest of the world that this can be done.

To further underscore this point, Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohd asserted at the 'Conference on Islam and Tolerance' in 1994 :

It should be understood that even the Qur'an had made it clear that there was

no compulsion in religion and that Muslims were required to have good ties with non-Muslims who did not develop animosity towards them. If all Muslims know and understand the teachings of Islam from the Qur'an, hadith and sunnah, from books and history, not only will their ties with non-Muslims improve, but also non-Muslims will really understand the teachings and principles of Islam. With this it will improve the Islamic tolerance in relation to all parties. This is an admirable attitude which should be adopted by the followers of all the religious in Malaysia.

Addressing a very young man who was very enthusiastic in the Buddha's teaching the Buddha said, 'Young man, you should not think I teach dharma to gain followers. You should not think that I teach dharma to encourage you to give up your religion to follow me, nor should you think I teach dharma to encourage you to do wrong things. If you follow a teacher and you find his teaching is conducive to your peace and happiness, follow him. I teach dharma to point out that there are things which are harmful to

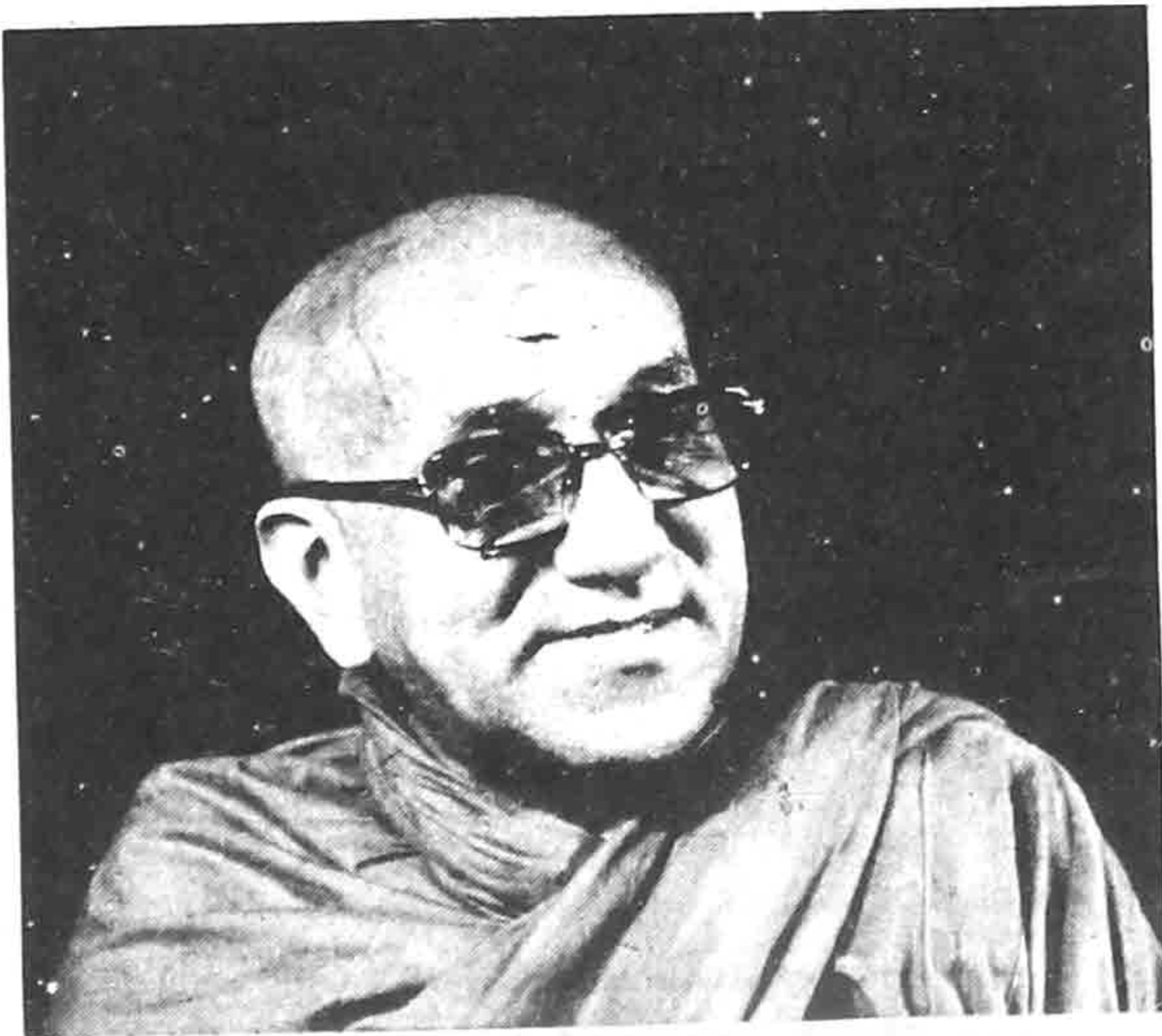
you and to others. You should abandon them. There are beautiful things for you and for others. Follow them.

'It is difficult for one to find ones own salvation by praising and glorifying one's own religion and condemning and ridiculing other religions.'(Dharmakirti)

Whenever there are different concepts and beliefs among the followers of different religions, instead of arguing or condemning each others beliefs, the best method for them to adapt in order to maintain their friendship is to agree to disagree.

**BUDDHISTS
NEED NOT CHANGE
THEIR RELIGION**

VEN. ANANDA MANGALA



Ven. Ananda Mangala Nayaka Thera

It is with deep regret that we record the untimely death of Venerable Ananda Mangala Nayaka Thera, the author of this booklet. The Venerable Monk passed away at the age of 68 on 28/1/86 in Singapore while this booklet was still in the press.

The late Venerable Ananda Mangala spent more than 25 years in this region and he was an indefatigable missionary in the cause of Buddhism. He travelled to many parts of the globe disseminating the peace message of the Buddha.

He worked in Singapore, Malacca, Kuala Lumpur and other parts of the country as an active Buddhist missionary. He was an eloquent speaker and invariably held his listeners spell-bound. His greatest talent was his ability to organise the vast potential of youth in Singapore and Malaysia and earlier in India for worthy causes.

Born to a Christian family in Sri Lanka, the late Venerable Monk received his early education in a missionary school. Later on during his well publicised work with Pandit Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, he was attracted to Buddhism and became a Buddhist monk and contributed towards Buddhist educational activities. Despite becoming a Buddhist, he never

condemned his former faith. In an article entitled "Not that I love Christ less, but the Buddha more", he stated that he never worked as anti-Christian although he would denounce the demeaning tactics used by some missionaries to spread their religion. He was equally critical of conservative Buddhist practices which were detrimental to the development of Buddhism. In this booklet, he does not attack Christianity, but he chooses to point out the validity of the Buddha's teaching and how it is supremely fitted to answer the problems of the modern world.

During his stay as a resident monk in the Buddhist Vihara Brickfields Kuala Lumpur, he contributed much to the activities of the Buddhist Missionary Society and the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society. His untimely death is a great loss to the Buddhist world.

We wish to record our deep appreciation of the Late Venerable Ananda Mangala's contributions to the development of Buddhism.

May he attain the most blissful state of Nibbana.

15-2-1986

Buddhist Missionary Society

Buddhists Need Not Change Their Religion

Evangelism

In multi-religious societies **Evangelism** is to be understood as a calm and a peaceful exercise in the propagation of religious beliefs. It also requires a respectful understanding of co-existence with other religious beliefs, whether primitive or more developed. Evangelization needs a disciplined code of 'Truthfulness' in furthering human resources to gain 'Freedom and Happiness', not only here and now, but also in the 'here-after'. The Noble Messages of the Buddha, Jesus Christ and the Holy Prophet contain a common humanistic and a sociological theme. It is only at points of 'Theology' the oneness disappears at varying degrees, and these at times have led to bitter confrontation.

Buddhism is undoubtedly the first evangelistic religion, followed by Christianity and Islam. When Gautama Buddha admonished his disciples in the following words, Buddha Dhamma became an evangelistic religion:—

“Go ye forth, O Bhikkhus, on your journey, for the profit of the many, for the bliss of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the profit, the bliss of devas and mankind. Go not, any two together. Proclaim, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma glorious in the beginning, glorious in its middle, and glorious in its ending.”

The Middle-Way

The Buddha Dhamma is known as the Middle-Way which urges the avoidance of extremes and keeping away from every shade of ‘impatience’ or ‘fanaticism’. It is a religion of purity, peace and perseverance. The other two evangelistic religions promote through Jesus Christ the concept of a ‘Creator God’, while the Holy Prophet upholds ‘Allah’s Mercy’.

Buddhism offers an alternative theme in its propagation requiring humanity to transcend human weaknesses through a socio-moral responsibility and cultivating a psychological sense of ‘Awareness’ about the ‘self’ which leads to a deeper insight of the true nature and the composition of the ‘self’ in the terms of the conditioned, created and originated. While

human reason is sustained to its giddy limits, there is enough elbow-room left to accommodate those areas which transcend reason and staggers any definition, description and demonstration but merely affirms a convincing reality through an enlightened mood promoting Realization.

A Code of Ethics

Emperor Ashoka established a golden rule of ethics when he admonished in the following manner:

“One should not honour only one’s own religion and condemn the religion of others; but one should also honour others’ religions for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one’s own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise, one digs the grave of one’s own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honours his own religion, and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking – ‘I will glorify my own religion’. But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely, as concord is good; Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others.”

No Proselytization

The Freedom of Religions is to be measured in the terms of human behaviourism rather than on a set of mere beliefs. Beliefs are to be put into action so that the distorted human patterns can promote human understanding and religious harmony. The word 'proselytization' is not a peaceful and a true 'religious term' but only a weapon of a politically oriented' group of believers.

Evangelization is a noble and a holy task, if carried on without 'pious camouflage' and slogan shouting 'ridicule' mesmerizing youth to strange statements like 'I Have Found It' or to more hurtful cries of 'pagans, heathens and infidels'.

New Trends

Christian dominated World Conferences on Religions are held now but gradually the fangs of a new technique' have been discovered. Traditional religions have basic and fundamental Teachings of the Buddha, The Holy Prophet, and the Vedas — however in these much publicized multi-religious

dialogues the pressure has always been to prove the 'God of the Christian' as the one and only 'Saviour' and the ultimate goal of spirituality .

Archbishop D Simon Lourdesamy, the Secretary for the Congregation for Evangelization chose a theme for Asia Day — "Christ the Light of the World". He says: "Christ is the light of salvation for all men and for all generations. And we ask: What does the light of Christ represent for the people of Asia? In the entire universe, for which Christ is the true Light, the people of Asia are a very important part, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Of the two and one-half billion inhabitants of Asia — more than two-thirds of the world's population . . . only 2% recognise Christ as the Light of their life. For the other 98%, Christ, in fact, is not their true Light. But, although they do not recognize Him as such, these Asian peoples, because of their great religions, are enlightened by rays of reflected light which are related to the true light and could lead to the direct source of Light, Christ. The mission of the Church, to enlighten the world with the Light of Christ, becomes then in certain aspects more demanding."

It is time that the Non-Christian world became

aware of these subtle attempts to belittle their own 'LIGHT' as a mere reflected glory of Christ.

True Conversion

I am aware that certain Christian Schools, while tactfully excluding Muslim pupils, do compel other Non-Christian pupils to attend 'chapel' and utilize such occasions to indoctrinate them by ridiculing highly progressive and peaceful philosophic approaches of the Buddhists and the Hindus.

Singapore is fortunate to have an enlightened educationist in the Principal of St Patrick's School, where non-Christians are given the opportunity to gain Moral Education according to their respective faiths.

True conversion can be understood when one is able to act according to a set of rules within some socio-moral responsibility. Whatever one's belief might be — the important issue is whether one has changed one's behaviour patterns within such a set of beliefs. It is important to emphasize that religious interpretation cannot be based upon 'compromises' but on the solid bedrock of Right and Wrong. It is

a sad tragedy to experience at times the path some religions have taken which is opposed to the Absolute Law of Righteousness resulting in the breeding of 'wolves in sheep's clothing'.

Buddhist Commitment

Buddhist commitment to their Faith does not in the least endanger the beliefs of others, because the degree of compassionate understanding and calm tolerance are well established aspects of the Buddha Dhamma.

Buddhists are willing partners in any attempt to establish the law of 'each according to his own'. Buddhists can always bear witness to another's Faith, and even defend that freedom of choice, even though not accepting the others faith. A Buddhist will not tamper with the Freedom of an Agnostic or even an Atheist. The commitment of Buddhists to the Four Noble Truths, which is a here-and-now scientific approach to all situations conditioned and originated; and the highly civilized training contained in the Noble Eightfold Path should in no way make them lesser than other believers. The uniqueness of the

Four Brahma Viharas of Love, Compassion, Altruistic Joy and Equanimity should ease other religionists from any suspicions based on fear and threats.

There are several areas within the theory of Karma and Rebirth that promote a serious responsibility towards society. Is there any need for a Buddhist to change Religion?

Self-Help

Buddhism extols humanity's capacity to help itself. It does not lay stress on any postulations as depending upon a Creator God and remaining ever a creature of a Creator. Buddhism promotes 'self-help!' Buddha says

"By oneself is evil done, and by oneself is evil undone". Again the Buddha exhorts, saying: "In this very one-fathom long body, along with its perceptions and thoughts, do I proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world". To become aware of 'Who am I and what am I' is the crisis of a Buddhist. The instructions found in the Noble Eight-fold Path are exercises for Self-

development. There are exercises for rehabilitation and there are untold preventives as well as curatives to be self-induced without fear but with an understanding experience of the nature of things as they occur.

There is no need for Buddhists to change their Religion when you take into consideration the following:—

1. Morality

The avoidance of evil is relative to the society we live in, so also the performance of good. However, there is a fundamental law of Cause and Effect that the Supreme Teacher expounded would bring about consequential re-action of evil begetting evil, and good yielding a harvest of goodness. The Buddha's admonishment did not come as a 'command' or as coming from an authority, who is both executioner and the rewarder. The Buddha with deep insight into the workings of Karma and Rebirth made an earnest and courteous request of his followers to take to the avoidance of evil and the performance of good.

The Buddha declared: 'Whether Buddhas arise or do not arise (to perceive and reveal the Truth) the

law of causality, the principle of the dependence of this factor upon that, the causal sequence of events remain fixed and an unalterable law''.

The materialist rejects the idea of God and Soul as the basis of a moral law. The Buddhists who are independent of a Creator God and of a soul maintain the validity of a moral law.

In the Anguttara Nikaya the Buddha said: "To believe that the cause of happiness or misery is God, Chance or Fate, leads to inaction." The freedom of choice between right and wrong, between ignorance and knowledge, implies the highest degree of personal responsibility.

The words 'good and evil' or 'right and wrong' do not convey clearly the Buddhist interpretation. Therefore, the Buddhists choose to call them 'skilful action' (kusalakamma) and 'unskilful action' (akusala-kamma).

Buddhist morality is more rational than any system of religious ethics which attempts to impose morality on man pretending that moral laws are the laws of a Creator, whose own work, the world itself shows no evidence of morality.

In the Dhammika Sutta the Buddha states: "He neither kills, steals, misuses the senses, speaks falsely, takes alcohol or drugs, causes others' nor condones others' acting in these ways". There can be varying degrees of restraint observed but the ideal follower of the Buddha becomes aware of an 'offence in the slightest fault'.

2. Compassion

This engages one in the highest concept of forgiveness. To accept people as they are and cultivate compassionate understanding. The grooming of agreeing to disagree. To accept the principle of 'each according to his own'. The capacity to tolerantly accept human error without condoning it. The willingness of one to rehabilitate one who is prone to human error. The care of not only the human species but all sentient beings and all living creatures.

The allowance one affords others to make a gradual level of progress. Compassion cultivates to accommodate all beings as they are and not as what they ought to be.

To be compassionate to oneself is very important therefore, without that intolerant 'must' and

'should' to gradually phase one's growth with utmost patience without any pollutions of 'disgust', 'bigotry', and 'fanaticism'.

3. Diligence

The greatest opportunity for one to exercise diligence and earnestness in striving towards 'righteousness' without the aid of 'gods', 'saviours' or even 'priests' is best known in the words of Buddha, when He admonished his disciples at the time of His passing away: "i exhort you. Subject to change are all component things. Strive on with diligence. Work out your own salvation". What courageous and daring counselling to experience that one is responsible to one's self.

The progressive one is to be reckoned as one who knows what he is and then attempts to become what he can — this is a compassionate approach in self-purification rather than frustrating one's self in idealistically straining to become what one should.

4. Freedom

The climate of Freedom permissible in the Buddha Way no other religious system can afford to

give allowance to. The Kalama Sutta upholds the highest concept of what religious freedom should be. It is a freedom that does not manacle human dignity at all. It is a freedom that unhooks one from dogmatic postures, dictatorial pronouncements. It is not only the freedom from the enslavement of human passions but the liberation from all hooks that makes people gullible to 'priest-craft' and that which baffles people about the mysterious nature of the world. It liberates one from the dependence of spiritual sedatives of the nature of 'miracles' and superstitions. It is the freedom to remove ignorance through self-effort. The freedom to become aware.

Redemption is Freedom. The joy of freeing oneself by oneself without dependence on any external forces except through education and growing awareness. The Freedom to redeem oneself even from the worst of suffering states (hells). Some other religions do not allow the Freedom of those in 'hells' ever again to make amends. There is freedom to all those who have been subjected to suffer for their evil deeds.

It is the freedom to liberate oneself from such areas where there is eternal damnation, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

5. The Excellence in Grooming

There is nothing to prove 'there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so'. The grooming of a Buddhist arises at the basic and most tangible level of humanity. The socio-moral responsibility is fashioned within the highest concepts of human dignity.

The Four Noble Truths educate one to transcend gullibility of accepting that which is subject to change as permanent and is in a state of happiness. It is a scientific approach to the meaning of life and all that makes the world go round. It is a factual statement of fact and not based upon pious make-beliefs.

The Noble Eightfold Path is the path leading to the cessation of suffering and growing towards Wisdom.

The excellence of the grooming promotes an area called 'Right Livelihood'.

It is a training where one sheds ignorance, superstition', pious jargon, reliance on rituals and ceremonies. It is a superbly brave technique to meet the challenges of time squarely.

6. Knowledge

Acquiring of mundane knowledge and gaining insight into the supramundane sphere are set tasks in Buddhism. There is no accommodation within the context of Buddha Dhamma to give reliance to 'revelations' or 'divine messages'. It is acquiring of knowledge from a down-to-earth understanding and experiencing the true nature of self and all that exists.

To know is only a beginning but to act according to one's knowledge that brings about the dividends of growing is wisdom.

Obstacles and conflicts are part of life and living. They are merely experiences to transcend our 'petty-ego', our 'frustrated-ego' or our 'deluded-ego'.

7. Faith

All religions promote Faith. Faith in Buddhism is not surrender to some make-belief or a postulation. Faith is not a result of fear and punishment. Faith is not a sugar-coated word to accept what one does not experience. Faith is not to accept what you really don't know under some idealistic fantasy. Faith according to the Buddhist concept is the courageous

acceptance of what one has found out through careful observation, analytical investigation and first-hand experience. Faith is a firm affirmation of what you really experience and come to know. Conviction based upon a wakeful awareness is an important ingredient in Buddhist Faith.

Faith is not through selfish levels of acceptance but of a selfless nature. To experience conditionality as impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-entity is a conviction bringing about faith.

Faith and Wisdom are not gifts from heaven but acquired through the cultivation of rational thinking, listening or studying and then putting into practice what has been assimilated in the process of growth.

8. No Extremes

The avoidance of extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification is a theme in the Middle Way of the Buddha. The avoidance of Eternalism and Annihilation. Neither the past nor the future but the present — here-and-now. Neither the optimism of success nor the pessimism of failure but the realism of things as they are.

A Word of Caution

Owing to the lack of a proper definition of what is **'unsocial or unethical'**, Buddhists must be cautious of evangelistic religions which tactfully **'proselytize'** so as not to be caught by the definition of unsocial and unethical. Our youth as well as our elders among the Buddhists in countries where Buddhists are a majority should take steps to **stem the tide of subtle conversion taking place in hospitals at the bedside of patients by uncalled for visitors of other religions.**

When our youth fall in love — they should become more cautious that in the concept of marriage **Buddhism advances a sociological and mundane sensual approach** without insisting that such marriages are made in heaven. Buddhists must be informed that Marriage is no Sacrament to them whereas to others it is a sacred issue binding them to accept such a marriage as a Holy Sacrament.

Sexuality in Buddhism is neither holy nor unholy except within the code of social ethics. **Buddhism advocates the transcendence of sexuality as the ultimate spiritual status.**

Husbands and wives of Buddhist origin should

not fall a prey to 'quack' religious counselling but seek the Dhamma as a sure refuge. Whenever among parents and children differences arise — Buddhists should not run to the nearest 'SOS' which is Christian oriented but resort to areas where Buddhist counselling is available.

It is time that the United Nations make a declaration of Religious Freedom. The Freedom of Religion must be defined — just as Democratic systems must be protected by democracy itself — Religions must be protected from the concept of a 'free-for-all' concept of Religious Freedom.

Methods of religious propaganda are becoming a threat to the young and also to long standing established religions that have always followed peaceful methods and whose followers though large in numbers do not fall into the category of the minority group's affluence.

The mass media has been thoroughly abused and public places are being utilized to cause havoc among the youth by various methods of 'hypnosis' and 'mesmerizing' techniques brought about through mass hysteria and group rhythmic sounds.

Religious slogans used for propagation make

subtle statements implying a less truthful and moral standard than commercial advertisements. If advertisements have to go through a processing by governmental authorities and at the same time subject to payment of a fee — Religious notices and strange advertisements like ‘I Have Found It’ should be subject to close scrutiny . . . in multi-religious societies.

Inter-religious dialogue more often adopts the theme ‘you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours’. Inter religious Organisations have served the community at times of need — but there should be an honest and truthful dialogue without any pretentious camouflage. Unlike politicians who have the liberty to change their tactics within certain contingencies, the religious people must conform to a strict discipline of never compromising with what appears as a good.

Charitable organisations’ personnel should be cautious not to let their humane activities succumb to their personal religious beliefs.

Buddha is not God

I have often heard it said that “Buddha is after all not God”. From the Creator God believing concept

the Buddhists of all types of 'yana' do not accept a Creator God. However, certain house-to-house and work-office-to-work-office campaigns had been going on to ridicule and bring down the stature of the Buddha in the minds of our young. While the Buddhists would freely tolerate the concept of a Creator God — they would not go from house-to-house to bring ridicule to this concept of a 'Creator God'.

The Christians, Hindus and the Muslims do postulate a Creator God in varying degrees of 'theological' measurements. All these Religions are agreed that there is a Creator God. However, the onus falls on which of these concepts truly contain the concept of God in all its sublimity and grace.

Is the God of the Jew the same as that of the Christian? Is the God of the Christian the same as that of the Holy Prophet's Allah? If so, there should have always been a high degree of amity and understanding between the Jews, Christians and the Muslims. Furthermore, the Brahma of the Hindus — is jointly and severally defined as 'heathen, pagan, and infidel' by the others.

We often hear that Jesus is God and that he is God incarnate. It is indeed a pious belief. However,

little reference is made of the reason why Jesus was crucified on the Cross by the Jews. According to the Jews, Jesus committed a very grave sacrilege and a blasphemy when he declared himself 'son of God' and God himself. This is a blasphemy against the God of Abraham, God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. For this reason alone the Jews crucified him on the Cross.

The issue of 'Buddha not being God' never becomes a criterion for the Buddhists — because they have an objective concept of a Creator God. In Buddhism there are several Gods — and in the samsaric cycle of births and deaths the Buddha, before he became so — had been some of these Gods. The Buddhists do respect the holy concept of a Creator God even though they do not accept a creator God. According to Buddhist concept to claim Buddha to be a Creator God — would only diminish the stature of the definition of a Samma Sambuddha. Furthermore, the Buddha means one who transcended the concept of 'God as well as all conditional levels of existence'. According to Buddhism, Gods are subject to birth and death — the residues of greed, hatred and delusion are in them. The very texture of Creation according

to Buddhist belief is a contradiction and a dualistic pattern — ever in peril with the features of impermanency, unsatisfactoriness and no-entity.

Buddha never rose again

In multi-religious societies where freedom of religion is a sacred task of democratic institutions, some do take advantage of this freedom to dramatize their messages to bring about 'twists' and through 'half-truths' break down the innocent growing youth — who have not yet had the opportunity to understand the depth of the Upanishads, Vedas and the **THRIPITAKA**.

The challenging statement '**Buddha never rose again from the Dead**' baffles many a Non-Christian and makes easy shift to misunderstand the concept of the Buddha as understood among Buddhists.

Buddhism emphasizes that all things born must die — and when they die — they'll live again — this being a recurring tragedy till such time as Enlightenment comes one's way. It is only then there is the achievement from the cessation of birth and death.

Jesus — they say, rose from the dead, It is said that he appeared to several people. His own disciple Thomas doubted this and then Jesus appeared to him and allowed him to put his finger through the unhealed wounds of Jesus' palms. We the Buddhists are willing to respect their view as their belief. However, to utilize such a belief so as to ridicule our own concept of the issues and our own Faith (Buddhism) amounts to an uncalled for freedom.

Here again, the crisis of having risen from the Dead does not arise in the minds of Buddhists. The 'apparitional' phenomenon of the dead coming back to communicate a message is not unusual in non-Christian religions.

According to the theory of Karma and Rebirth, the process of new birth in apparition form and then disappearing after forty days is not unusual. The Chinese tradition keeps every Chinese family alerted to the appearance of their loved ones among them within the forty-days period.

While we who are non-Christians would very much like to bear witness to the fervent joy of the Christians — we would equally wish to make Christians understand the important reasons why the Resurrection of Jesus does not become an issue of wonder.

The classic reference to Buddhas being seen is

contained in the words of the Buddha. **"He who sees the Dhamma sees Me"**.

Saving of Sinners and Salvation

It is said that **God loves Sinners**. But these are sinners who seek his forgiveness. Therefore, **God does hate sinners who never regret** and they are cast into the mire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth . . . for all eternity.

There is no redemption at all for the die-hard sinners who do not repent and who have only a shrunken period of a human life-span, to make it or break-down.

In the **Buddha Dhamma** and **Hindusim** there are ample opportunities coming the way of those in the hells to start a rehabilitation programme to gain Bliss. The great Devadatta, the mystic monk who defied Buddha was completely engrossed in the crime of hate against the Buddha. The earth swallowed him through an earthquake — The Buddha at this moment announced that **Devadatta was being swallowed by the earth and would experience great suffering. However, the same Devadatta he said would attain Enlightenment as a 'paccekabuddha' in a future period.**

Buddhists Be Alert

In countries where Buddhists are a majority, efforts must be made to build less temples and monasteries. I feel in most Buddhist countries there are too many temples but less schools, colleges, orphanages, social welfare centres and community centres.

There is so much to learn from our Christian and Muslim systems in the field of social service and education. Buddhists must take upon themselves the onus of caring for their Buddhists in all areas and make a concerted effort to cater for the needs of the schooling children, orphans, the sick, the old and the 'lost-sheep'.

Buddhist nurses must be given a training on how to stand by a Buddhist patient — Buddhist social workers should educate themselves in matters of the Dhamma.

Charity begins at Home

It is time some of our renowned Buddhists channeled their charitable frame of mind to afford ample opportunity for Buddhists to run pilot projects

for the welfare of Buddhists in the field of hospitals, old-folks' homes, orphanages, etc. Let present-day temples be the workshops of education, training in disciplines, gaining skills in craftsmanship, etc. Let there be less prayer and chanting but more work in the social and educational spheres.

The world indeed will be a happy and a peaceful place to live, if only the Arab will not pursue the Jew, the Protestants do not pursue the Roman Catholics, the Christians cease to chase after the 'heathen, pagan infidel' and the 'free-thinker'. If only all people can make a united effort to accept the world as one-serve and promote the welfare of one's needy, the poor, the hungry and shelterless — the World will be beautiful.

It will be a happy day for multi-religious societies when respective religions look after their own folk without interfering with the religious beliefs of others. Let us not be less accommodating than the founders of our religions.

*With bad advisors forever left behind,
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.*

*The supreme and endless blessings
of Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Pure Land of
Limitless Light!*

~The Vows of Samantabhadra~

*I vow that when my life approaches its end,
All obstructions will be swept away;
I will see Amitabha Buddha,
And be born in His Western Pure Land of
Ultimate Bliss and Peace.*

*When reborn in the Western Pure Land,
I will perfect and completely fulfill
Without exception these Great Vows,
To delight and benefit all beings.*

*~The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra~*

DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtue
accrued from this work
adorn Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land,
repay the four great kindnesses above,
and relieve the suffering of
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts
generate Bodhi-mind,
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,
and finally be reborn together in
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.
Homage to Amita Buddha!

NAMO AMITABHA

南無阿彌陀佛

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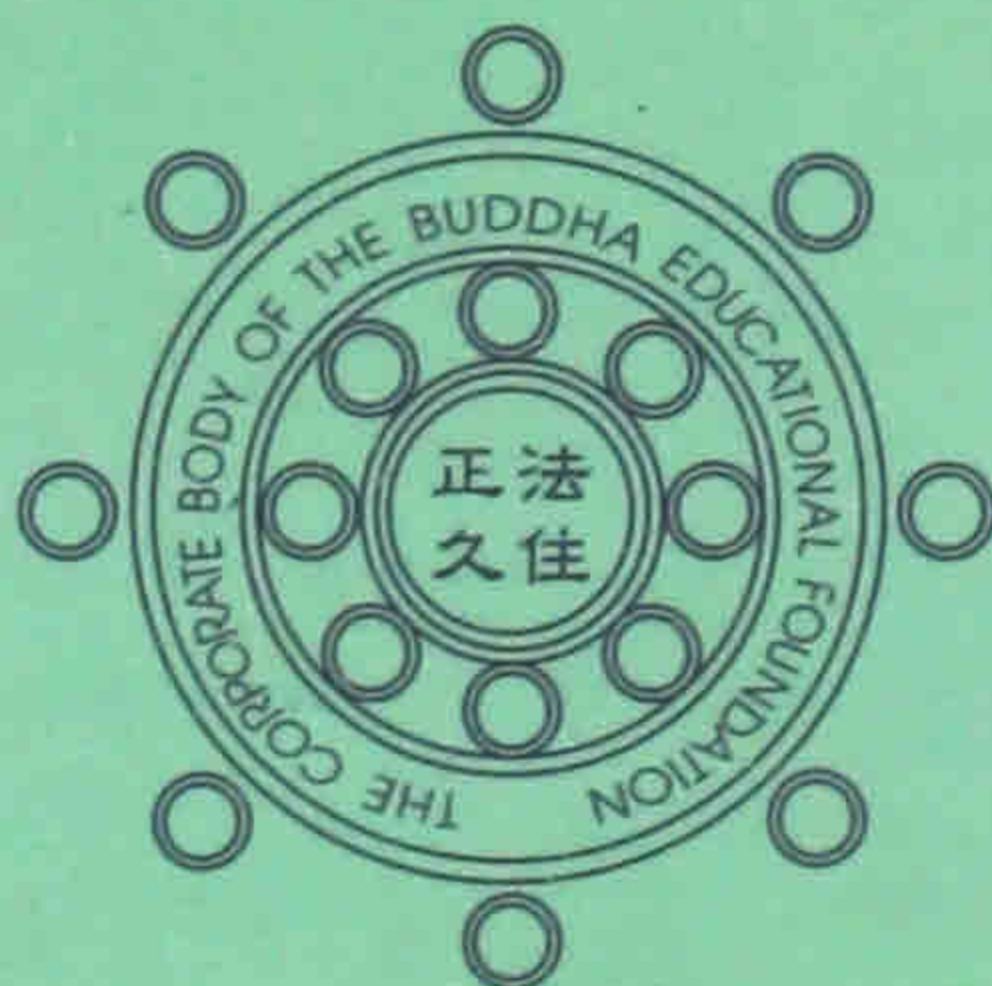
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please pass it on to others or
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Thanks for your co-operation.
Namo Amitabha!



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