• The Buddhist Way
• Practical Buddhism
• How to Practise Buddhism
• Buddhism and the Free Thinkers
• Buddhism as a Religion
• Buddhism for the Future

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About the Author

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Besides his talks the Venerable has been able to reach an even wider audience through his publications which range from the voluminous “Dhammapada” to little five page pamphlets. He has reached all levels of readers from erudite scholar monks to young schoolchildren. His whole approach to the exposition of the Dhamma is governed by his deep concern for giving the ancient teachings a contemporary relevance, to show that the Sublime Message is timeless and has a meaning that cuts across the boundaries of time, space, race culture and even religious beliefs.
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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

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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 is 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,
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 sombly 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
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](image)
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 almshowing 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.
Practical Buddhism

K. Sri Dhammananda
MESSAGE

It gives me the utmost pleasure as President of the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society to have been given this opportunity to convey our heartiest felicitations to the Buddhist Missionary Society on the occasion of its 25th Anniversary celebrations.

The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society is proud to have been closely associated with the Buddhist Missionary Society whose task has been the propagation of Buddhism not only in Malaysia but in other parts of the world as well. As custodians of the Buddhist Vihara the Sasana Society has always made every attempt possible to make the Vihara and its premises a fit and congenial place for the B.M.S. to carry out its activities without any inconvenience.

We are proud to note the excellent work done by the B.M.S. in carrying out the noble task of spreading the Dhamma according to the injunctions of the Lord Buddha — with goodwill and mutual understanding. Through the relentless efforts of the B.M.S. the Buddhist Vihara has become the focal point of much of our Buddhist activities. Its Buddhist publications have gone far and wide into every corner of the globe. The receipt of numerous letters of appreciation from readers from all over the world is ample testimony of the widespread interest the B.M.S. publications have generated. This is indeed a major achievement which we can all be proud of.
Our Society would also like to record its deep appreciation of the incomparable work done by the most Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda, Spiritual Director and the Founder of the B.M.S. who is also the Patron of the Sasana Society. Ven. Dhammananda’s vision and foresight in founding the B.M.S. contributed a great deal in creating a new awakening amongst the Buddhist community in this country. His patience and far-sightedness was the crucial factor which has resulted in the close co-operation which exists between the two societies today.

Once again on behalf of all the members of the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society I wish to extend my congratulations to the President and all the members of the Buddhist Missionary Society. May our close co-operation and understanding continue for all time.

Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu!

M.H. Albert,
President,
Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society.

Buddhist Vihara,
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 *Sīla* or moral discipline by practising Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. *Samādhi* or mental culture is developed through the application of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. The development of *Sīla* and *Samādhi* 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 practices 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 religious. 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
imaginings 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 — 1:1_
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)
HOW TO PRACTISE BUDDHISM

Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda
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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 cul-
tured 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 what-
ever 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 unsa-
tisfactoriness. 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 suf-
fering. 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**

*Silā, *Samadhi*, *Panna*

The Dharma taught by the Buddha shows us the correct path. This path or method is classified into three stages. They are *Silā* (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 *silā* 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 ‘*silā*’. 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 ‘*silā*’. 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-

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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 exis-
tence for that matter is problematic but modern man
has increased and complicated these problems a thou-
sand fold, all unnecessarily, and of his own making.

The Buddha Preached According to His Own
Experience

T
he 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 expe-
rienced 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 com-
passion 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 dis-
cover 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.
This booklet is specially published to mark the 66th Anniversary of the ordination of Our Most Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayake Maha Thera, JSM., Ph.D., D. Litt. the Chief resident monk of the Buddhist Mahavihara, Founder of the Buddhist Missionary Society and Patron to the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society.
Many so-called free thinkers are actually not "free" thinkers, but they are lazy to think. Just because they do not want to think seriously and ponder about the meaning of their existence they say they are free thinkers. There is no room for these kinds of thinkers in Buddhism. Buddhism encourages people to think freely but deeply and without bias.

Immediately after gaining enlightenment, when there were many disciples, the Buddha said, "Monks, now you and I are free from human and divine bondages". Here, we can find a clue to what a free thinker is. Usually, people try to introduce their religious concepts and beliefs and practices by imposing divine bondages and appealing
divine messages. The Buddha has rejected such concepts. He said he and his Disciples are free from divine and human bondage.

What are these bondages? They are various kinds of beliefs, cravings, attachments, concepts, traditions and customs created in the name of religion by exploiting fear and suspicion. People who are enslaved by such beliefs and practices are in bondage. In what way was the Buddha a free thinker or how can we claim that Buddhism is a religion of freedom and reason?

**Freedom to Think Freely to Understand the Truth**

The Buddha has given full freedom for man to think freely without depending on the concept of a god, a Buddha or any teacher to understand the truth. That is freedom. According to some western thinkers Buddhism is known as "the religion of freedom and reason". Freedom however must be guided by reason. Otherwise, people can abuse that freedom. For instance, if a government gives full freedom for people to live or to do anything according to their free will I am sure that within twenty four hours, they can ruin the whole country. That is the
danger of giving freedom without first developing reason in the minds of people. We must follow the same principle in practising religion.

Although some people say that free will exists for man to exert, we know that without proper training and guidance the use of that free will can lead to disastrous consequences. A child may have free will, but it has to be taught not to play with a live electric wire.

The Buddha emphasizes that freewill is not a gift from any external source. It is intrinsic to us. Human behaviour, human character, humanistic minds are characteristics which are developed over many life times. Whether we are cultured or uncultured, civilised or uncivilised, religious or irreligious, good or bad, wicked or kind, depends on our mental habits which we developed life after life in the past. These characteristics are not given by anybody.

Religion becomes important to guide and direct man's way of thinking by giving proper guidelines. The purpose of religion is to help a human being train his mind so that he develops understanding and acts in a morally responsible way. He does good because he "knows" that is the right thing to
do, not because he wants to avoid punishment or receive rewards. Religion is an aid to individual development.

Why should we not depend on anybody? If we are going to stop our evil, wicked, selfish thinking fearing that there is somebody to punish us, we will never give a chance for our mind to cultivate understanding, kindness, compassion. People also sometimes do good deeds or provide some service to others in expectation of a big reward. If this is the motivation, they will not develop sympathy, understanding according to the true meaning of these words. They become selfish avoiding evil deeds to escape punishment or do good to get rewards. This is selfishness. The Buddha did not advocate this. If heaven and hell were both closed down, how many people would remain religious? Buddhism however encourages moral behaviour without reference to heaven or hell. This is the uniqueness in the Buddha’s teaching.

A Religion of Freedom and Reason

The main purpose of religion is not to ensure escape from punishment or gain a reward but
to help one become perfect and to end physical and mental suffering and be free from unsatisfactoriness.

The Buddha also wanted to cultivate humanity according to certain moral and ethical codes, discipline, and character. This is to be achieved without resorting to temptations provided by promises of heaven or to fear by threats of hell fire. That is why this religion is described as a religion of freedom and reason. The Buddha encouraged us to learn with an open-mind to investigate and to understand the world. We must accept nothing at once on mere faith. The Buddha says, “Do not accept anything through mere faith because it will make it difficult for you to understand the truth, because that faith can make you a blind follower.

This kind of blind faith can lead to religious fanaticism. People react emotionally to their religious authorities rather than deciding rationally whether something is true or false because they have not developed analytical knowledge in their minds to understand why they should uphold certain moral practices and why they should keep away from certain immoral practices.
For instance, when a boy can not understand things properly, a father or mother threaten him. If he is very mischievous, they can even beat him and warn him not to make mistakes. Because of that fear, the child may stop doing mischievous deeds but he is not helped to realise why it is wrong and where the mistake is. That only creates fear of punishment. Again, when they ask a child to do something and if he refuses, then, the parents will bribe him with the promise of a reward. The child may do it, but again without understanding why. It will be easy for him to revert to the wrong way of thinking or action without understanding. Similarly, we should not introduce religion through reward and punishment, without allowing people to have proper understanding.

If we try to introduce religion through punishment and rewards, people will not understand the real validity and main purpose of religion. That is why in Buddhism there is no threat of religious punishment. The duty of a religion is to guide, educate and enlighten people.

Punishment is the duty of the law of the land. Religion should not undertake the role of the law to punish people. Otherwise, there will be fear but not understanding. This is the
nature of the Buddha’s teaching and why we regard him as a free thinker.

**Religious Freedom**

In the Buddha’s time, there was a group of young people who could not understand how to choose a religion freely because at that time, there were more than sixty two religious groups in India. So they approached the Buddha and told him about their problem. They said that they did not know how to select a proper religion. The Buddha did not say that Buddhism was the only true religion and that all other religions were wrong. Then he gave certain guidelines for these young people to think freely without depending on the authority of teachers or religious leaders. This advice is an important aspect of the Buddha’s doctrine.

Intellectuals all over the world appreciate the Buddha’s attitude because of the liberal advice that the Buddha gave for people to think freely. The Buddha did not claim that he is the only true religious teacher and if one came and worshipped and prayed to him, one would be saved, one’s sins would be forgiven, one would end up in heaven or nirvana after death. He also never suggested
that we should disrespect other religious teachers. He said, "respect those who are worthy of respect". Some people believe that if they worship or respect another religious teacher, they commit a sin.

This is because there are some religionists who warn that if their followers step into another place of worship, or read some other religious book or if they listen to another religious talk, they commit a sin and will be punished in hell. They want to show that they are allergic to other religions. This creates fear and keeps people ignorant. Buddhism does not encourage this kind of intolerant attitudes. Again, the Buddha says, "Accept the truth whenever it is available. Support everybody irrespective of their religions".

It is wrong to blindfold and mislead innocent people. By creating discrimination they propagate very unhealthy ideas in the name of religion. Because of that, many people have come to regard religion as a nuisance. Goodwill, unity, harmony and relationships amongst humanity is destroyed due to such hostile attitudes. Sometimes, members of the same family are divided into different groups through the influence of such religious attitude.
Buddhists have never been encouraged to adopt such hostile attitudes to spread Buddhism over the last 2,500 years. That is why Buddhists do not organise questionable methods to convert the followers of other religion into Buddhism. Buddhists do not think that it is very important to convert others, by thinking that the followers of other religion are sinners. The Buddha never instituted a method to baptise people or to forgive sins committed by them.

When you compare your religious freedom with that of others for example, you can appreciate the freedom that you enjoy from your birth up to your grave. There is no religious law in Buddhism that demands marriages to be performed according to religious dictates, since Buddhists do not believe that divorce is impossible just because it is recorded in heaven. If a marriage is recorded in heaven, then it must be just as possible to cancel it by requesting that the record be deleted! Isn't that true freedom?

We have to accept the duties and obligations taught in religion not as law but a free choice. We have to act according to our own conviction and according to our way of life. We must not blindly accept certain ready
made religious laws given by the religious authorities. Religion should not be accepted because of fear but with an open mind to know how to make use of life to serve others and to understand the meaning of existence.

Today, all over the world, people are fighting to propagate their own religious beliefs. They are fighting, harbouring jealousy, and creating hatred towards other existing religions. There are people who had been practising their religion for more than two or three thousand years as part of their cultural heritage or way of life. The rich legacy, rich psychology, philosophy, respectable and harmless life, morals and ethics have helped them to lead a noble life. Yet, some other religious groups try to force them to accept their religious beliefs by promising to send them to heaven, as if they have been given the sole authority to monopolise heaven. They try to tell others that only through their religion, can people go to heaven.

According to Buddhism, the followers of any religion or even those who have no particular religious labels also can go to heaven. This they can do if they have cultivated their humane qualities and if they have not abused their human life and
have maintained human dignity and human intelligence.

According to some religionists, a man who leads a harmless life, cannot go to heaven without first accepting their god. But a criminal who violates, endangers innocent people by committing all sorts of evil deeds gets the chance to go to heaven because he simply says a moment before his death, "I believe". They say if you embrace their religion, god forgives all the sins that you have committed and straight away, you get sent to heaven.

The criminal has the chance to go to heaven after violating peace and happiness of innocent people. According to them, a god can save the criminal but has no sympathy towards those who have become his victims.

If a god can save the culprit after committing evil deeds and harming others, why it is so difficult for him to stop those evil deeds before they were committed? Buddhists believe that whether people have different religious labels or even if they claim not to have any religion, if they are good, cultured people and if they do not harm others and if they have gentleness, they are considered respectable from the Buddhist point of view.
The biggest problem that we are facing is that we have so many traditions and customs introduced by our forefathers according to their way of thinking at that time. They had their own perspectives. In the past, science and technology and worldly knowledge about life and the world and the universe was very poor. Motivated by fear and ignorance they started various kinds of rites and rituals and ceremonies.

Later these practices became traditions. These traditions were then formalised into various cultures. As Buddhists, we can accept these practices as part of our different cultures.

But we must not feel we are bound to accept and practice all these traditions. We respect culture, and tradition but at the same time must try to find out whether they are of any significance or meaningful and whether they are good for us as well as for others. If they are good for both sides, then we must accept them. If not, we should feel free to discard them and adopt new ways which are relevant to our modern way of life.
How to Choose a Religion

When choosing a religion, we must avoid hearsay. People come and tell us all sorts of fascinating stories about various supernatural powers of their masters, gurus, teachers, religious practices, gods and goddesses. They exaggerate and beautify the incidents or stories and come and tell us to accept their beliefs. The Buddha's advice is not to accept what they say without considering it carefully. We have a human mind to think but because of our weaknesses we do not give a chance for that mind to think without bias.

The Buddha advised us not to accept anything without weighing every argument impartially. If we do not, sooner or later we will come to know that what we accepted in a hurry is wrong.

One must not to depend on any holy book without studying it properly. Some people say that their holy books are true and others are wrong. They also say that it is a divine message, recorded by religious authority and we should accept it without question. The Buddha's advice is not to accept any of those things which are recorded in the holy books without carefully
consideration. Can you find another religious teacher who uttered such words? He has given credit to human intelligence. How much freedom he has given to us to seek a religion!

According to the Buddhist concept people can record anything in their books and later introduce them as holy books with divine messages. People accept these things without any question. Religious authorities use their power to control human beings as if they are small children. They have their ready made religious concepts. So they hand over their concepts for people to accept and believe. Therefore, people have no chance to use their common sense or reasoning to understand things properly.

The next advice of the Buddha is not to accept anything through mere reasoning. Although we advise people not to accept anything without reasoning, the Buddha says we must not use mere reasoning. Our reasoning is very limited. Even small children can reason according to their way of thinking. We can reason out certain things within our thinking capacity. When we compare our reasoning with that of the great thinkers or scientists, then in the eyes of those high intellectuals, our reasoning is not accurate.
When we compare the reasoning of those intellectuals with enlightened religious teachers’ way of reasoning, we can understand that the intellectuals’ reasoning is also not perfect.

That is why the Buddha says, accept the truth within your capacity but do not claim it as absolute truth at once. Allow your mind to reason things out. Allow it to grow, develop. Do not close your mind immediately. What you have accepted later can change according to experiences and maturity and proper understanding.

The next advice is not to accept anything through logical argument. Argument depends on ability, knowledge and skill and a talented attitude but not on truth and fact. Argument can arouse emotion and egoism.

**The Three Natures**

The main purpose of religion is to concentrate more on how to cultivate a noble human way of life, moral conduct, discipline, to maintain peace, happiness and confidence in the mind, and to promote liberation from fear, worry, anger, hatred and delusion rather than devoting more time for worshipping, praying and performing some
rites and rituals.

Human beings have three characteristics. They are: the animal nature, the human nature and the divine or sublime nature. Religion is important to suppress or to control the animal nature in the human. We cannot achieve this by only worshpping. If human beings also live only to eat, to seek protection and to procreate, then there is no difference between animals and humans.

However, the human being is different from the animal in that he can be taught to develop a superior mind. Religion is a powerful factor to help him in this task.

There is an extraordinary characteristic in the human mind that is called Dharma.

The Dharma is based on our humane qualities. As human beings, we have to cultivate moral shame and moral fear. What is it? Fear of evil, wicked, cruel, dangerous things to be committed, that is called moral fear. On the other hand, as human beings we think it is shameful thing for us to do some bad, immoral things. That is called moral shame. To maintain human dignity, to give due credit to human intelligence, we have to develop moral shame and moral fear.

We have so many religions in the world and so many places of worship. In the East at
least, the churches, mosques, temples and places of worship are crowded. They say, religion is progressing well. Everywhere we see people, praying and worshipping and burning joss sticks and papers but how many people are there amongst those worshippers who maintain moral shame and moral fear in them? If these natural, ennobling qualities are absent, is there true religion? Many of these people who proclaim their religion so loudly actually even lack humane qualities, let alone religious piety.

**The Importance of Religious Principles**

Religion can develop humane qualities in many ways. What are these qualities? We must have understanding to maintain human dignity and behave as human beings. We must learn how to live without disturbing or harming others which is more important than many other qualities. Cultivate goodwill and understanding. Whether we pray or not, we have to cultivate patience, tolerance, compassion and sincerity. How many human beings are there in this world today who truly have honesty in them? A real religion can cultivate these qualities. Science, technology
or nuclear energy can manage to change the whole world but such energy also can not change the human mind. Who can change it? We know that it is difficult even for a god to change our mind. No other external force can do that. We have to change our own minds. According to the Buddha, if there is anybody in this world who can change the mind, it is the individual himself, no one else.

We can be given ideas on how to do it. We can be told how to train the mind. We have to cultivate the mind through understanding and determination. That is why knowledge is important. By following the religious disciplines many changes take place in the mind for our betterment. Therefore, religious principles are important no matter where they are preached. Whether it is Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam makes no difference. If people can cultivate good qualities, everyone should be able to enjoy heaven without any discrimination. Heaven is not reserved for or monopolised by one particular religious group. It should be open to everybody who has good qualities.

The Buddhist concept of heaven is where one is happy, prosperous, fortunate and satisfactory for a long period. In one way we
can say that the pleasures of heaven are simply an extension of the pleasures we seek on earth. But spiritual development or a sublime state of mind is more important than worldly pleasures.

We should not wait until divine qualities come down from heaven to purify us. We have to cultivate them by eradicating any animal nature we have in us. By developing our human nature we gain the divine nature or sublime state. It is a gradual development. Divine nature means leading a noble, pure life. The normal human behaviour is uncertain and unpredictable and it is difficult to trust another human being. Almost everyday, we experience more fear, suspicion, tension because of human beings, rather than animals, devils or ghosts. Religion is important to cultivate those qualities against unreliable and selfish human attitudes.

What constitutes the sublime nature? The Buddha taught that there are four mental states we must develop: Metta, Karuna, Mudita, Upekkha. These four qualities must be there to gain that highest achievement in the mind. It simply means we must cultivate goodwill and virtue without any discrimination towards anybody or anything.

Buddhism teaches Metta (goodwill).
Christianity teaches love. Islam teaches brotherhood. Hinduism teaches oneness in every human being. Many people have these qualities but they reserve them only for their own kind, those who belong to their club, so to speak. They extend goodwill, friendship and brotherhood towards their own community or towards the followers of their own religion, but not for others. That is not how the Buddha taught us to extend goodwill and compassion. He said we must radiate goodwill, harmony and sympathy towards every living beings without any discrimination and not only towards those who are close to us. In fact the Buddha says we must earnestly develop a heart full of love – like that a mother feels for her only child towards everything that exists.

**The Need to Have a Religion**

Many people claim to be free thinkers because they do not want to choose a religion. They simply refuse to have an opinion about such important matters as their existence. and are even proud of it. This is not a very healthy state of affairs. Of course, each person is at liberty to choose his own religion according to his convictions.
To do this, he must find time to study and investigate. Nevertheless he should not condemn any particular religion just because he cannot understand or agree with it. Neither should he remain forever without a religion. He should find out a suitable religion for himself since there are existing rational and practicable religions in this world, accepted by intelligent people. A man without a religion is likened to an isolated small boat in a stormy sea.

An explanation of the purpose of life and salvation depends on religion. By practising a rational religion one can train oneself to live as a cultured person and finally be able to achieve the aim of life. His wealth, academic knowledge, name, power and other embellishments cannot give him his peace of mind and happiness. A person without a religion will feel that something is lacking in him more particularly during the latter part of his life. Religion is the only friend which can give him satisfaction and consolation up to his last moment.

If all those so-called free thinkers do really think freely, they must maintain that attitude in all other aspects of their lives. Why do they want to represent themselves as free thinkers only with respect to religion?
Some people feel that if they can live as cultured people without following any religion, there is no necessity for them to possess a religion. Such people should remember that it was religion that taught mankind to live as cultured people. However religion does not mean mere religious labels but religious principles. There is no righteous way of life which religion has not influenced. Therefore man must not forget religion. Religion alone can turn the tide of selfish materialism and guide man towards the goal of selfless dedication and service to mankind. The benefits of religious instruction belong to the inner spirit of the human personality.

Religion and culture cannot be separated. When religious practices and beliefs penetrate the minds of the people for centuries they forget the religion but continue to practise these codes of behaviour as part of their culture.

**Misjudging of Religion**

It has often been said that religions have failed to prevent war. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that many religionists have failed to put into actual practice the
religious principles which they are supposed to profess. At times even so-called religious leaders have gone to the extent of encouraging killing without the least compunction justifying themselves by claiming they are Holy wars sanctioned by heaven.

War is war whether it is for the sake of the country or nation, culture or heritage, and language or religion; war in the name of religion is the most sinister act; because religion itself should teach us not to kill and to protect the sanctity of all forms of life.

One should not judge the merits or demerits of a religion simply by watching certain ill-conceived practices and beliefs adopted by ill-informed people in the name of religion. The original teachings of the great teachers are open to everybody.

It is very hard to find a single attitude of man with which religion is not involved. Those who do not claim to have a religion do in fact unconsciously observe certain religious principles which are to be found in every religion.

No religion was introduced into this world to mislead humanity. The founders of every religion revealed certain truths to guide man towards his destination. But the followers of those great teachers sometimes
adopted various questionable methods and interpretations of their own to introduce their Masters' Messages. It is up to the people therefore to choose their particular religion which they feel is closer to reality.

Religion does not hinder the material progress of man if he really can understand and practise a proper religion. But religion does not encourage man to run after the mirage of illusory worldly pleasures to find his happiness.

We have seen already that much evil has been done in the name of religion, and that even today it is still possible for fanaticism of a pseudo-religious kind to incite man to commit grievous crimes against humanity.

**Devoting Time to Religion**

Some people might say that they have no time to devote to religion since they have so many other social and political and personal commitments to meet. The following statement would serve as an answer to such people: "A man who puts aside his religion because he is going to join society is like one who takes off his shoes because he is about to embark on a journey."

A man who involves himself deeply in
various activities of everyday society to the extent of forgetting his religion is making a mistake. Therefore, he needs more guidance from religion.

One need not abandon the world to practise religion. Running away from the duties of life is hardly of any use in a modern world, where every man and woman has to work to earn his or her keep. We are indeed destined to work, and we must have the courage to face it and try to get rid of the problems that it entails without causing harm to anybody.

Some people are scared of religions. These are generally due to the various questionable methods adopted by certain missionaries in propagating their beliefs. They do it in such a questionable and aggressive manner and with such undue persistence as to constitute a public nuisance.

There are some who hold that since they and they alone are in possession of the absolute truth and the means of salvation, they should not tolerate the views of others. Many crimes have been committed in the name of such unfounded doctrines. In reality the exaltation of intolerance is nothing but a cover for dogmatic beliefs that cannot meet the light of reasoned criticism.
Certain religions have not given a proper answer to the problem "Why we suffer in this world". They advise us to believe in something which we cannot agree with. What we want is to choose a religion in which we can find the real answer to our problems. Religion must not be a matter of blind faith.

Irreligion is sometimes propagated under the garment of religion. Religion, many people think, belongs to the temple or the church and the priests and is not a subject for the home, or the laymen. To many, religion is considered as only suitable to the old folks but not the young, to the women folks not the men, to the poor, not the rich.

To them religion could only be found within the covers of some musty books but not among the flowers that bloom so freshly in the fields. These ideas are the results of their negligence and laziness in matters concerning religion.

Today many people talk of religious freedom; but when we survey the world over it will be seen that real religious freedom is not practised in most parts of the world. Real religious freedom does not only mean that people should have the freedom to practise their own religion but that they
should also be given the liberty to choose any religion to follow according to their own convictions. Very unfortunately few people have this freedom. There are various obstructions in their way and threats from every quarter.

In fact people must have the freedom to choose any religion if they cannot agree with the teachings of the religion to which they already belong. Those who cause obstruction to this attitude of religious freedom really rob man of his free will and thereby hinder his inner peace.

Religious beliefs and practices should not deprive or disgrace human dignity, education and human intelligence.
An Appreciation

In conjunction with the Centenary Celebration of the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, the Management Committee feels honoured to be able to publish this book which is based on a Dhamma talk entitled "What is Buddhism?", delivered at the Buddhist Maha Vihara by the Most Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayake Thera as part of a ten week course on World Religions.

In brief, the contents of this publication are a simple exposition of Buddhism as a modern way of life by this highly qualified scholar who has a special gift to interpret the Dhamma to people from every walk of life.

The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society most humbly expresses its gratitude and pays tribute to the most Venerable for his indefatigable services in his exposition of the Dhamma and for rendering invaluable
services to the cause of Buddhism for more than 42 years in this country as well as worldwide.

We are indeed proud to have been associated with someone of his calibre.

In conclusion, the Society wishes to express its sincere thanks to the Chief Venerable, Mr Vijaya Samarawickrama for the editorial work and to Mr Ooi Chooi Seng for transcribing the talk from tape. Grateful thanks are also due to Ms Chong Hong Choo, Messrs. Jimmy C. S. Lim, Alex Perera, Quah Swee Kheng, Eddy Yu Chen Lim and Bobby Sai for the invaluable services rendered in the publication of this book.

May they be well and happy!

Manoris H. Albert
President
Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society
Buddhist Maha Vihara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
S
ince there are already so many religions in this world, why is it necessary for us to have another religion called Buddhism? Is there any extraordinary characteristic or contribution or significant feature that Buddhism has which other religions do not have? There is a school of thought which says that all religions are essentially the same. There are no significant differences. The only difference is in the interpretation and practice. After all, in the final analysis, all of us end in one place, either heaven or hell. That is the common belief of most religions. Does Buddhism share this viewpoint? To answer this question we have to examine what is meant by religion.

**Definition**

In the academic study of religion as a phenomenon in history the term ‘religion’ can be considered in its different aspects: as an inner experience, as theology, or intellectual formulation of doctrine, as a basis or source of ethics and as an element in culture.

Different scholars have given different views and opinions of its nature and meaning. According to Aldous Huxley, religion is, among other things, a system of education, by means of which human beings
may train themselves, first to make desirable changes in their own personalities and in society, and second, to heighten consciousness and so establish more adequate relations between themselves and the universe of which they are parts. Modern Indian philosophers like Dr. Radhakrishnan, have expounded the theme that religion is not a set of doctrines but that it is experience. And religious experience is based on the realisation of the 'presence of the divine in man.' H.G. Wells says 'religion is the central part of our education that determines our moral conduct'. The German philosopher, Kant, stated that 'religion is the recognition of our moral principles as laws that must not be transgressed.'

The Buddha's message as a religious way of life: "Keeping away from all evil deeds, cultivation of life by doing good deeds and purification of mind from mental impurities."

For our purposes, religion may be defined in a very broad sense as a body of moral and philosophical teachings and the acceptance with confidence of such teachings. In this sense, Buddhism is a religion.

Buddhism however does not neatly fit into the general categories outlined earlier because it does not share common features
with other existing religions in many ways. To consider this matter further let us first of all briefly examine how religion could have come into being.

**Beginnings**

Why did religion originate? You might have heard that the origins of religion lie in man's fear, suspicion and insecurity. In the days before organised religions began, people did not have adequate knowledge and they could not understand the real nature of this life and what would happen to them after their deaths. They could not understand even the causes of natural phenomena or natural occurrences. According to their limited understanding, they suspected there must be certain unknown forces which created all these pleasant or unpleasant things. Eventually, they began to notice that there is an energy behind the forces of nature which they called ‘*shakti*’. They experienced an inexplicable sense of awe and dread towards these powers which they felt could harm them in some way. They therefore felt that these powers must be placated and used to protect or at least to leave them alone. Not trusting their ability to “talk” to these forces in ordinary language, they thought it would be more effective to mime their messages. Finally the
actions to enlist the favour of these forces became ritualized into forms of worship. Some people were identified as having special powers to communicate with these forces and they enjoyed great power in the group.

After worshipping and praying, early men thought they could control the undesirable occurrences and at the same time ensure a degree of protection as reward from these unseen forces or energies. To help them better visualize what they were trying to communicate with, they gave each force a name and a form — either conceiving it in human or in grotesque non-human form, but always evoking a sense of awe and fear. As time went by, they forgot the original significance of these representations and took them for real and eventually accepted them as deities.

Different cultures translated ideas and concepts into physical form and developed particular rituals to honour and worship these images as gods. Later as early urban settlements began and social control became necessary certain practices were used as the bases to develop moral behaviour and to guide citizens in the correct path to ensure the well being of the community. Thus developed concepts such as humanism, human responsibilities and
human values such as honesty, kindness, compassion, patience, tolerance, devotion, unity and harmony. To ensure that these qualities would be further enhanced, the leaders instilled fear in the believers, threatening them with punishment by the gods in the life hereafter if they did not behave in an accepted manner. Religion was the result of the fusion of moral behaviour and belief in the supernatural. We will discuss Morality in greater detail later.

**Concept of God**

This is how imagination and humanism eventually fused together to become religion. Some people say that it is difficult to believe that any god created religion. Perhaps we could say that man created religion and later introduced the concept of a god into religion. An American philosopher, Prof. Whitehead, once stated that originally man created god and later god created man. What he meant was that the concept of god was created by man and later this concept was transformed into divinity. On the other hand, a French philosopher, Anatole France said that if the concept of god did not exist, some how or other, man would have created one because it is very important for his psyche. A divine power is necessary to allay our innate fear,
suspicion, worries, disturbances, anxiety, craving. To avoid problems we depend on an external force to give us solace. Knowing the nature of the human mind, therefore, Anatole France said that if a god did not exist we would have to create one.

In this sense we are just like children. When a small baby is crying and the mother is too busy to carry it, what she does is to put a teat in its mouth to comfort it. That will stop the baby from crying. The concept of god helps many people in this manner. To stop their worries and dry their tears they develop various pacifiers in the form of religious beliefs and practices.

**The Buddha**

It was in a religious climate such as this that the Buddha appeared. As a prince living in the lap of luxury he started to think very deeply on why living beings suffer in this world. What is the cause of this suffering? he asked. One day while he was sitting under a tree as a young boy, he saw a snake suddenly appear and catch a frog. As the snake and the frog were struggling, an eagle swooped down from the sky and took away the snake with the frog still in its mouth. That incident was the turning point for the young prince to renounce the worldly life. He began to think about how living beings
on the earth and in the water survive by preying on each other. One life form tries to grab and the other tries to escape and this eternal battle will continue as long as the world exists. This never-ending process of hunting, and self preservation is the basis of our unhappiness. It is the source of all suffering. The Prince decided that he would discover the means to end this suffering.

Renunciation
He studied under various religious teachers and learnt everything they had to teach but was unable to discover how to end suffering. He spent many years pondering this question. Finally at the age of 29 he seriously contemplated on old age, sickness, death and freedom through renunciation, and decided that without giving up his worldly preoccupations and his responsibilities and pleasures it would be impossible for him to find the answer. That is why he had to leave the palace in what is known as “The Great Renunciation”. After struggling for six years, which represented the culmination of endless life cycles of cultivation and struggle for spiritual development, he finally gained enlightenment and understood the secret of our suffering. This was the beginning of another ‘religious system’. But it was a
religion like nothing anyone had known in the past. In fact many people today do not even like to call Buddhism a religion, because the word ‘religion’ evokes a great many negative emotions in their minds.

**Beliefs and Practices in Ancient India**

There was no reason at all for the Buddha to introduce another religion because at that time 2600 years ago there were already 62 religious cults in India alone. Since the existing religions during his time could not provide the answers to his questions he decided not to use the ingredients or concepts of these religions to introduce what he himself had realised.

What was the religious thinking in India at the time? "God created everybody; god is responsible for everything; god will reward; god can forgive all our sins; and god is responsible for our lives after our death; god will send us to heaven or he will send us to hell".

These are the basic ingredients of all religions even today. At the same time there were certain other religions also in India which taught that it was necessary for believers to torture their physical bodies, thinking that they could wash away all their sins during their lifetimes so they could go to heaven after death. Another religious
group encouraged religious rites and rituals and ceremonies and animal sacrifices to please their gods. This group believed that through these practices they could go to heaven. Some others again introduced prayer and worship and asked forgiveness for the sins committed. The Buddha did not recognise the efficacy of all these practices.

Did The Buddha Make Any Promise?

The Buddha did not promise heavenly bliss and rewards to those who called themselves his followers nor did he promise salvation to those who had faith in him. To him religion was not a bargain but a noble way of life to gain enlightenment and salvation. The Buddha did not want followers with blind faith; he wanted human beings to think and understand. Buddhism is a noble path for living where humanism, equality, justice and peace reign supreme. Revengefulness, animosity, condemnation and resentment are alien to the Teaching.

The world is indebted to the Buddha for the rise of rationalism as a protest against the superstitions of religion. It is he who emancipated man from the thraldom of the priests. It is he who first showed the way to free man from the coils of hypocrisy and religious dictatorship.
During the Buddha's time no religious practice was considered higher than the rites, rituals and sacrifice of living beings to the gods; but to the Buddha no practice could be more humiliating or degrading to man. A sacrifice is nothing more than bribery; and salvation won by bribery and corruption is not a salvation which any self-respecting man would care to get.

**Religious Terminology**

But in introducing his doctrine, the Buddha did use the existing religious terms current in India at the time because in this way he would be on familiar ground with his listeners. They would grasp what he was alluding to and then he could proceed to develop his original ideas from this common ground.

_Dharma, Karma, Nirvana, Moksha, Niraya, Samsara, Atma_ are some words which were common to all religious groups during his time. But in his teaching the Buddha gave very rational and unique meanings and interpretations to those existing religious terms.

**Dharma**

Let us take a look at the word dharma (or dhamma), for example. The ancient interpretation given to the word dharma is
that it is a law given by the god. According to ancient belief the god promised to appear from time to time to protect this dharma by taking different incarnations. The Buddha did not accept that any god could have given doctrines and commandments and religious laws. The Buddha used the word dharma to describe his entire teaching. Dharma means that which holds up, upholds, supports.

The Buddha taught the dharma to help us escape the suffering caused by existence and to prevent us from degrading human dignity and descending into lower states such as hell, animal, the spirit or ghost or devil realms. The dharma introduced by the Buddha holds and supports us, and frees us from the misery of these realms. It also means that if we follow the methods he advocates we will never get into such unfortunate circumstances as being born blind, crippled, deaf, dumb or mad. So in the Buddha’s usage, dharma is the advice given to support us in our struggle to be free from suffering and also to upgrade human values. Western philosophers describe Buddhism as a noble way of life or as ‘a religion of freedom and reason’.

The Dharma is not an extraordinary law created by or given by anyone. Our body itself is Dharma. Our mind itself is Dharma;
the whole universe is Dharma. By understanding the nature of the physical body and the nature of the mind and worldly conditions we realize the Dharma. The Buddha taught us to understand the nature of our existence rationally in a realistic way. It concerns the life, here and now, of each sentient being and thus interrelatedly of all existence.

Usually when people talk about religion they ask, "What is your faith?" They use the word "faith." The Buddha was not interested in the development of "faith" in an absolute sense, although it can be useful in the preliminary stages of one's religious development. The danger of relying on faith alone without analytical knowledge is that it can make us into religious fanatics. Those who allow faith to crystallize in their minds cannot see other peoples' point of view because they have already established in their minds that what they believe is alone the truth. The Buddha insisted that one must not accept even his own Teachings on the basis of faith alone. One must gain knowledge and then develop understanding through study, discussion, meditation and finally contemplation. Knowledge is one thing, understanding is another. If there is understanding one can adjust one's life according to changing circumstances based
on the knowledge one has. We may have met learned people who know many things but are not realistic because their egoism, their selfishness, their anger, their hatred do not allow them to gain unbiased mental attitudes and peace of mind. When it is necessary to compromise, we must know how to compromise. When it is necessary to tolerate, we must know how to tolerate. When it is necessary to stand firm we must stand firm, with dignity.

Karma
Let us take another example, the word karma (or kamma). It simply means action. If a person commits a bad karma it will be impossible for that person to escape from its bad effect. Somehow or other he or she must face the consequences that will follow. According to ancient belief there is a god to operate the effect of this karma. God punishes according to one's bad karma; god rewards according to one's good karma. The Buddha did not accept this belief. He said there is no being or force which handles the operation of the effects of karma. Karma itself will yield the result, as a neutral operation of the law of cause and effect. He said we can avoid and, in some cases, even overcome the effect of karma if we act wisely. He said we must never surrender
ourselves fatalistically thinking that once we have done bad action there can be no more hope. Other religions teach that god can negate the effect of karma through forgiveness if the followers worship and pray and sacrifice. But the Buddha teaches that we have to effect our salvation by our own effort and mental purity.

"The Buddha can tell you what to do but he can not do the work for you." You have to do the work of salvation yourself. The Buddha has clearly stated that no one can do any thing for another for salvation except show the way. Therefore we must not depend on god, and not even depend on the Buddha. We must know what are the qualities, duties, and responsibilities of being a human being. He said that if we have committed certain bad karma, we should not waste precious energy by being frustrated or disappointed in our effort to put it right.

The first thing to do is to firmly resolve to stop repeating such bad karma by realising the harm it can do. The second thing is to cultivate more and more good karma. Thirdly, we must try to reduce evil thought, selfishness, hatred, anger, jealousy, grudges, and ill-will. In this way we can reduce the bad effect of the bad karma that we commit. This is the Buddha’s method for
overcoming the bad effects. He did not say we must pray to and worship him and that he would forgive all our sins.

Purity and impurity of our mind depend on ourselves. Neither god, Buddha, nor human being can pollute or purify one’s mind. I cannot create impurity in your mind, I cannot purify your mind. But by taking my word or my action you create either purity or impurity within yourself. Outsiders cannot do anything for your mind if your mind is strong enough to resist it. That is why knowledge and understanding are important.

The Buddha taught that what man needs for his happiness is not a religion or a mass of theories but an understanding of the cosmic nature of the universe and its complete operation according to the laws of cause and effect. Until this fact is fully understood, man’s understanding of life and existence will remain imperfect and faulty. ‘The path that the Buddha showed us is, I believe, the only path humanity must tread if it is to escape disaster’.

~ Jawaharlal Nehru

**Nirvana**

The Buddha never claimed to have created the Dharma. What he discovered was the universal truth of the real nature of existence. In fact some religious terms were
already well known in India at that time. But the Buddha’s uniqueness is that he took existing concepts and gave them very refined meanings and much deeper significance.

For example, before the Buddha’s time, “Nirvana” (or Nibbana) simply meant peace or extinction. But he gave it entirely new dimensions of meaning. NI means “no” and VANA means “craving”: No more craving, no more attachment and no more selfishness. We cannot experience Nirvana because we have craving, attachment and selfishness. When we get rid of these defilements we can experience Nirvanic bliss. It is difficult to experience true bliss because we have emotions and we crave for sensual gratification. So long as we live entangled in this world of sensual pleasures we will never experience true happiness. Of course it is true that we experience some kind of happiness in life but it cannot be termed “happiness” in the absolute sense of the word because it is not permanent.

We cannot gain bliss by harbouring anger or hatred, selfishness or delusion. Occasionally, we do experience certain degrees of emotional satisfaction, but the nature of this happiness is just like lightning, it is fleeting. It appears for a moment and disappears the next. True bliss
is not like this. If there is true bliss we will experience a permanent sense of calmness, satisfaction and tranquillity. So the real purpose of our lives should be to purify our clouded, deluded, misled minds and free ourselves from worries and disturbances. So long as we spend our time constantly solving problems, always looking over our shoulders, always wondering what to do next, we can never be at peace.

**Develop the Mind**

The Buddha's advice is that we should be free from these distractions if we want to experience bliss. This release must however be obtained by our own effort and come from within ourselves. We cannot gain salvation from a god or the Buddha or from heaven. We cannot get ultimate freedom through external agents. Supernatural beings cannot help us to gain wisdom and final liberation no matter how much we worship them or praise them through penances, charms, mantras, incantations and invocations and animal sacrifices.

"We are the results of what we were and we will be the results of what we are." Actions condition our happiness or unhappiness and finally secure our salvation. Salvation or deliverance is an individual affair, just as each human being has to eat, drink and
digest and sleep for himself. All karmic actions are maintained as part of our mental formations and remain there submerged. We remain oblivious of these past actions because the other mental activities cloud the mind which therefore cannot recall actions in the past. When we develop our minds through meditation we arrest the distractions provided by the five senses. When the mind is clear it reduces anxiety, craving, anger, jealousy and delusion. The mind that is clear becomes energetic and alert. This is when we can influence the mental activities and release enormous latent power. This is psychic power. It is present in all of us: we only have to learn to release it through meditation. Another way of reaching the deposited mental activities is by hypnotism. Through hypnotism some people have developed a degree of psychic power, but it is not recommended because hypnotism depends on another agent and does not effect purification of the mind.

The Buddha advised his followers to cultivate and develop the latent power within them and showed them how to make the best use of their will-power and intelligence without being slaves to an unknown being to find eternal happiness. Without blaming anybody else, Buddhism also teaches that man is responsible for his
own action. Man should face the facts of life, and shoulder the responsibilities of life by fulfilling his duties and obligations to himself as well as to others. His pain and pleasure are created by himself and he has the ability to get rid of his sufferings and maintain peace and happiness by understanding his weaknesses and using his own effort to overcome them. Man's untrained mind is responsible for all the troubles, calamities, disturbances, unfavourable circumstances and even the changes of elements and matter. Conversely man's mind can change unfortunate situations in the world and also can make it a peaceful, prosperous and happy place for all to live. This can be done only through the purification of mental energy.

**The Buddha's Method**

The Buddha's technique of teaching was different from that of the others. He never gave prepared “public talks” or “lectures.” He always decided on a topic based on an immediate incident or observation. One of the marks of the Buddha's genius and his skill as a teacher was his well-tried pedagogical practice of proceeding from the “known to the unknown.” For example on one occasion as he and his followers were walking along a river bank he noticed a
piece of wood floating downstream. He stopped and asked, "What do you think of that piece of wood? What will happen to it?" One disciple answered, "It may land on an island in the middle of the river"; others said, "It may get saturated with water and sink"; "People will take it and cut it up for firewood" and "It will complete its journey to the sea." Now who is correct? Who can accurately predict the fate of the piece of wood? The Buddha then explained that our life is just like a piece of wood floating downstream, full of uncertainty. No one can say what will happen to us the next day or the next month. His method was to take lessons from everyday life so that his teachings were always rooted in the here and now and totally relevant to human experience.

In this way, he gave due credit to human beings to think freely, by using their common sense. He did not introduce a religion to be practised slavishly out of fear and craving for any worldly gain.

According to the Buddha a beautiful thought and word which is not followed by corresponding action is like a bright flower that has no scent and will bear no fruit.

The eightfold path introduced by the Buddha is a planned course of inward culture and progress. By merely resorting to
external worship, ceremonies and prayers, one can never make progress in righteousness and inner development. Mere prayer for salvation, the Buddha says, is like "asking the farther bank of a river to come over so that one may get to the other side without personal effort."

Self-Discovery
Many religions claim that messages were revealed to mankind by a god. However some rationalists ask, if there is only one god, and he had given his message for the benefit of all mankind, why are there so many different beliefs in the world? If the message was meant for the whole of the human race what was the difficulty for the god to announce his message publicly so that there would be no room for doubt or misinterpretation? Everybody would accept the message and there would be no religious friction and the whole world could just follow the one message of the god.

Many years ago, there was a religious seminar at the University of Malaya. There were five speakers, one from each religion. After they had talked, one student asked, "When we study our religion we get some information about this world and the universe and life. When we study science we get entirely different information. This information
contradicts our religious concepts. So I do not know what to accept, the teaching of my religion or the teaching of science."

One of the speakers replied, "Well I believe that god gave his doctrines in the form of a message to one man who then spread it to others, so we must believe the word of god."

But the student persisted, "How do you know that the people to whom this message was conveyed understood it correctly? Could it not have been distorted and misinterpreted in their minds and then passed on to posterity?"

The Buddha on the other hand never claimed anything like receiving knowledge from outside sources. Throughout his ministry he always asserted that his listeners were free to question him and challenge his teachings so that they could personally realize the truth. He said, "Come and see" (Ehipassiko). He did not say "Come and believe."

Whenever he spoke anything, it was because he had personally tested the validity of the saying for himself as an ordinary human being. He claimed no divinity. He understood everything because he knew how he had to suffer during so many previous births for all the bad deeds he had committed through ignorance. He had learned the hard way. He advised his followers through his own experience. He
had done tremendous service to mankind by practising and observing the great (perfections) PARAMIS over countless lifetimes and finally experienced the supreme bliss. We have to ask ourselves which is more reliable, the testimony of one who speaks from personal experience or that of one who claims to have heard it from someone else who is always invisible.

**Freedom of Thought**

The Buddha’s advice was not to depend on theories, on cults and gurus. In fact, at all times we must remain masters of ourselves through self-reliance. We must never surrender our dignity or freewill. The Buddha strongly advocated the doctrine of self-reliance, purity, courtesy, enlightenment, peace and universal love. He stressed the need for understanding because without it, psychic insight leading to wisdom cannot be obtained. He says “If you wish to see the end of your suffering and fear, develop discipline, compassion and wisdom.” We must always allow our minds the freedom to think and understand without depending on external influence. Those who depend on others are like small children. We must follow the example of the Buddha who said that when he was meditating to gain enlightenment no gods came to whisper in
his ear to reveal hidden secrets of spiritual power. No one gave him any command-
ments or religious laws to introduce. He said, "I never had any teacher or divinity to
teach me or tell me how to gain enlighten-
ment. What I achieved I did by my own
effort, energy, knowledge and purity to gain
supreme wisdom."

That is why he said that wisdom `arose'
in him at his enlightenment. Wisdom is
latent in all of us. We only need to provide
the right conditions for it to arise.

From the intellectual and philosophical
content of Buddhism has arisen the
freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry.
This has no parallel in any of the esta-
lished world religions. There is no
obligation, no compulsion to believe or
accept any doctrine.

The approach of Buddhism is one of
seeing and understanding — it is a scientific
attitude of mind. Fundamental philoso-
phical doctrines taught in Buddhism are
being more and more corroborated by new
scientific discoveries. Buddhism advocates
self-confidence, self restraint, self-reliance
and self-purification to the individual in
society.

A strong feature of Buddhism is the
importance it attaches to democratic ideals.
Unhindered discussions are encouraged,
where even contrary views are aired and lead to broadening and enriching of the mind. The orders of monks and nuns are constituted entirely on these democratic principles.

This is in accordance with the Dharma revealed by the Supreme Buddha, who had the openness and courage to exhort his followers not even to accept what he himself had pronounced, without prior examination and conviction. In fact, the Buddha had stated that the Dharma was his teacher and all he did was to reveal the truth of this universal Dharma, which had lain hidden from the people wallowing in their ignorance. We must give our minds the freedom to think without bias and to think independently.

Before his passing away the Buddha's final words were "Be a refuge unto yourselves." Why is it that after 45 years of preaching he uttered such words? Why did he not advise everyone to find salvation through him? What he meant was that we must not seek salvation by depending on others. We must develop our own confidence in ourselves. What wonderful and noble advice! You may perhaps now ask, 'Why do we say "Buddham saranam gacchami?" '(I go to the Buddha for refuge?)

When we say this we do not mean that
we depend on the Buddha. We mean that if we follow the Method taught by the Buddha we will develop the confidence to work out our own salvation. We certainly do not think that the Buddha will come one day and take us up to "heaven" in a glorious flight.

Some people say that the Buddha was only a human and not a god. Why should people follow him? They cannot understand that Buddhists do not expect their salvation directly from the Buddha but by practising the noble method taught by him. The Buddha's Method from the very beginning was to train us how to work for the development of self-reliance by training our minds. Self-effort and self-realisation is the only path to salvation.

Any one can stand before the Buddha with dignity and not be like a slave. With hope and confidence one can determine one's own fate. The Buddha will welcome you if you stand as a dignified human being. But you must be prepared to be reasonable and listen to sensible arguments which are contradictory to your beliefs and have right observation. This should be the attitude of understanding people. When he was about to pass away, many great people, princes, ministers and even divine beings came to pay homage to him with flowers, but the
Buddha instructed his attendant Ananda to tell them that if anyone wanted to honour their master, they had to follow his teachings. This shows that he did not want personal glory for himself or demand total submission to his power.

**Impartiality**

After realising the truth, understanding people try to cultivate their minds to guard and protect themselves. They neither accept nor reject what is said by someone. Krishnamurti says that those who always depend on others’ ideas are second class human beings. Don’t accept or believe anything that is taught as religious practice and at the same time don’t reject it outright either. Certain things that we accept as true, we may later discover to be untrue after all. Conversely, we may be forced to admit that certain things that we rejected at first may be true after all. That is why the Buddha has advised us to wait for a time and study, think, observe, investigate before we decide whether there is any truth in something we hear and whether to accept or to reject it. By relying on our emotions or blind faith or anxiety, we may accept certain things or even be sceptical. As a result of laziness or confusion of the mind we may reject or disbelieve something we hear. But we must
give a chance for the mind to think and understand whether it is true or not.

**Faith**

Mere faith is meaningless because faith must be tempered with the understanding that comes from training the mind. The main purpose of a religion must be to show a follower how to use his knowledge with critical understanding to maximize his sense of well-being and self fulfilment. No matter how much knowledge we have, if we do not uproot defilements and doubt in our minds, we will remain in an unhappy state. When we attain the highest state of purity (*arahanthahood*) we completely uproot our cravings, anger, delusion and establish total equanimity of the mind. It is then that the "pure ones" arrive at a state when they cannot create any bad thoughts. They cannot utter harsh words or commit evil actions. One who has purified his mind is a hundred times superior to those who are powerful or those who have mere faith or knowledge and wallow in the impurities of the mind. We claim to be "civilized", but how can we claim this when our minds show impure traits to the same extent as our "primitive" ancestors did thousands of years ago?

All over the world people crowd in
temples, churches, mosques and other places of worship to pray, do sacrifice, perform penance. But when they come out they have the same anger, craving, jealousy, grudges and enmity that they had before. People claim to be ‘religious’ when they pray and worship and perform religious ceremonies, but their MINDS remain selfish, and devious. If they are truly religious they will not discriminate against others, or hurt and ridicule others in their religious practices. The Buddha tried to open our minds to understand things perfectly without developing fanatical religious beliefs and discrimination.

Heresy
Another reason why the teaching of the Buddha does not fall into the category of an established religion is that there is no room for “heresy” in its system. A heresy is something that challenges the “word of god.” The Buddha freely invited both his followers and his opponents to challenge his teachings from every possible angle so that there would be no room for any kind of doubt. True to his injunctions his followers have argued about his doctrines and even founded different schools of Buddhism according to their understanding, without violence or bloodshed. In fact at the famous
Buddhist University of Nalanda (which was destroyed at the fanatical hands of other religionists), followers of Theravada and and Mahayana schools of Buddhism lived together and studied and debated their different points of view in perfect harmony. The Buddha taught that if anyone really believed that he knew the truth, then he should not be afraid to have it challenged, because the truth will always win. Moreover, he actively encouraged anyone to challenge his teachings. His replies to numerous questions enriched the doctrine into a vast religious field which was faithfully recorded by his disciples. We are today able to answer any questions about Buddhism, simply by referring to the Buddha's explanations. Rational thinking and the importance of inviting criticism are paramount in Buddhism.

**Science**

The test of a religious teaching is in its conformity with the findings of science and the attraction it casts on the minds of persons possessed of acute intelligence. Some religions have experienced a measure of discomfort, as science unfolds its discoveries. As a result certain modifications or re-interpretations of their scriptures have become necessary. In this respect
Buddhism, the rational teaching of the Enlightened One, faces no such embarrass-
ment, as its basic principles are in close harmony with the findings of science. Let us
study just one example.

In the light of the latest studies of the atom, the old concept of the world is
radically changing, just as the concept of the atom itself is changing. There is no more
matter as it was believed in the past; it has been reduced to energy, and even concept
of energy is disappearing gradually and the scientists themselves do not know what
to call it. They are now coming to the conclusion that the atom is only a concept
and by extension, that the world too is nothing but a conception. The more they
make researches into the structure of the atom the more they seem to be convinced
of this conclusion.

In Buddhism this theory was expounded sixteen centuries ago, if not earlier. In the
4th century A.C. the Buddhist philosopher, Asanga, developed a theory known as
Vijnapti-matra or Citta-matra, based on the original Canonical texts which enunciate
that this world is just a conception, just a thought, just an idea. In order to prove this
theory, Asanga had to define the atom, and his definition, made sixteen hundred years
ago, is still valid up to this day. The atom
(paramanu) should be understood as not having a physical body (nissarira). The determination of the nature of the atom is done by the intellect through the ultimate analysis of the mass of matter. Of course, Asanga's interest was not in physics, but in the metaphysical and the philosophical. His interest was to show that this world, which ordinary people take as substance, was nothing real, but only a concept. According to Albert Einstein, when the universe is analysed there is nothing which remains as substance but only vibrations or waves.

The doctrine of Buddha Dharma stands today, as unaffected by the march of time and the expansion of knowledge as when it was first enunciated. No matter to what lengths increased scientific knowledge can extend man's mental horizon, within the framework of the Dharma there is room for the acceptance and assimilation of further discovery. This is because Buddhism does not rely for its appeal upon limited concepts of primitive minds nor for its power upon the negation of thought.

**Miracles**

Science today does not deny the possibility of miracles, as it once did, but is beginning to accept that what were known as miracles were but manifestations of phenomena as
yet unknown. The Buddha himself expounded this view: to him miracles were not in themselves to be regarded as demonstration of truth, but showed only a mastery of little-known powers that may be developed by some people. It did not necessarily follow that their possessor was an enlightened or divine being.

This being so, the Buddha not only taught his followers to be wary in the exercise of any miraculous powers they might acquire, but also warned others not to be unduly impressed by such exhibitions. Thus, whereas other religions exploit their miraculous elements to the greatest possible extent in order to convince the masses, Buddhism treats all such things as of very minor importance and irrelevant to the real task of spiritual development and emancipation. According to the Buddha the highest miracle is the conversion of an ignorant man to become a wise man.

In this connection, Swami Vivekananda says, "The idea of supernatural beings may arouse to a certain extent, the power of action in man, but it also brings dependence; it brings fear; it brings superstition. It degenerates into a horrible belief in the natural weakness of the man."

The scientific attitude and content of Buddhism has led Albert Einstein to say
that "if there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism."

**Ethics and Society**

The other important aspect of Buddhism as a world religion is its attitude to social, economic and political problems. Uninformed people have generally tended to consider this religion as an escape or withdrawal from active life, retiring into a temple, or into a cave or into a forest and leading a life cut off from society. This however, is due to a lack of understanding, for the Buddha himself was one of the hardest working persons that ever lived in this world. He slept only two and a half hours each night and the rest of the time he worked. He walked the length and breadth of India met people from all walks of life, talked to them and taught them. He did not talk about Nirvana all the time and to everybody he met. He spoke according to their way of life and levels of understanding. The Buddha said that he would not expect a beginner to realise the highest noble Truth at once. He said that his was a gradual path. Therefore helping people in various ways according to their standard or evolution and progress, is part of this religion. An active social, economic and political life cannot be
separated from true religious life.

In the religion of the Buddha is to be found a comprehensive system of ethics, and a transcendental metaphysics embracing a sublime psychology. It satisfies all temperaments. To the simple minded it offers a code of morality, a gorgeous worship and even a hope of life in heaven; to the earnest devotee, a system of pure thoughts, a lofty philosophy and moral teachings that lead to enlightenment and liberation from all sufferings. But the basic doctrine is the self-purification of man. Spiritual progress is impossible for him who does not lead a life of purity and compassion.

In its organised form, as a popularly practised religion of the masses, with the many ceremonies, processions and festivals incorporating various customs and traditions, Buddhism provides for ample motivation, experience and material for education. Family functions, village ceremonies, cultural performances and events like births, weddings, deaths and memorial services provide education in an informal way. Children learn most of their customs, manners, cultural, values and even aspirations by observing or participating in these non-formal educational activities. Youths and adults too gain from them.
Beyond the personal level and the emancipation of the individual, Buddhism recognises the family as a unit of society and nation. Thus to the ordinary householder whose highest aim consists in gaining material satisfaction here and going to heaven hereafter, Buddhism provides a simple code of morality — as contained in the Sigalovada Sutra — the practice of which will strengthen the solidarity of a community. It maintains the right relations between its family members, employers and employees.

In another discourse the Buddha has given ten kinds of advice for people to respect and to fulfill their duties and responsibilities towards their parents, children, husbands and wives, relatives, elders, their departed ones, devas (deities) and to live in harmony in society without becoming nuisances to the public and to lead blameless lives.

Such a teaching has the well-being of all members of a society as its aim and provides for diligent practice of friendly action which is the mark of a truly social being. On the other hand, the advanced person who realises the hindrances of the household life (a path defiled by passions), can resort to a higher code of morals and ethics, as contained in the rules of the Holy
Order, known as the Vinaya. They will enable him to lead a life of purity, holiness and renunciation unfettered by mundane distractions.

**Morality**

Buddhist morality is based on freedom and understanding. Because morality grew out of society's need for self-preservation, it must necessarily adapt itself to changing times and circumstances. Morality is therefore relative. In fact there cannot be any morality or ethical concept if it is grounded in compulsion or interference from any agent outside the individual himself. The individual must agree freely to any restriction placed on him for morality to be truly effective.

Compassionate Love (Metta) is the basis of all moral and ethical conduct in Buddhism. Out of this compassion arises all ethical and moral precepts, social service, social justice, social welfare. Equality, brotherhood, tolerance, understanding, respect for life, respect for others' views, respect for others' religions, all these have their roots in Compassionate Love. Based on this great noble principle, Buddhism has always been a religion of peace. Its long history is free from the taints of religious wars, religious persecutions and inquisi-
tions. Buddhism in this respect stands unique in the history of religions. Of the Buddha's noble example in this matter, Swami Vivekananda says in his lectures on karmayoga: "The whole human race has produced but one such person, such high philosophy, such wide sympathy. The great philosopher, preaching the highest philosophy, yet has the deepest sympathy for the lowest animals, and never puts forward a claim for himself. He is the ideal Karma Yogi, acting entirely without motive, and the history of humanity shows him to have been the greatest man ever born, beyond compare, the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed."

In respect to its social and moral code, the German philosopher, Prof. Max Muller has said, "The Buddhist moral code taken by itself is one of the most perfect which the world has ever known."

On this point all testimonies from hostile and friendly quarters agree; philosophers there may have been, religious preachers, subtle metaphysicists, disputants there may have been, but where shall we find such an incarnation of love, love that knows no distinction of caste and creed or colour, a love that overflowed even the bounds of humanity, that embraced the whole of sentient beings in its sweep, a love
that embodied the gospel of universal loving-kindness (Metta) and non-injury (Ahimsa)?

Albert Schweitzer says, "In this sphere, the Buddha gave expression to truths of everlasting value and advanced the ethics not of India alone but of humanity. The Buddha was one of the greatest ethical men of genius ever bestowed upon the world."

Furthermore, Prof. Rhys Davids observed that the study of Buddhism should be considered a necessary part of any ethical course and should not be dismissed in a page or two but receive its due recognition in the historical perspective of ethical evolution.

**Economic Development**

Within a Buddhist framework, the possibility of economic development on a dynamic and meaningful basis is receiving greater attention in the more affluent as well as in the developing countries. Modern development theory has failed to grapple with the increasing environmental and social problems in most developed societies and Buddhism offers a way out of this impasse.

The Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutra in the Digha Nikaya clearly states that poverty is the cause of crime and immorality. The Buddha and his disciples taught the people
the value of earning wealth and the importance of economic development for their well-being and happiness. In the Kutadanta Sutra (in the Digha Nikaya) the Buddha also expounded that crimes such as stealing could not be stopped by punishment. For such crimes to be adequately and properly controlled and stopped, opportunities should be provided for the people to be happily engaged in their occupations to enable them to lead comfortable lives.

- Economic security (āthi-sukha)
- enjoyment of wealth (bhoga-sukha)
- freedom from debts (anana-sukha)
- leading a faultless life (anavajja-sukha): these are four kinds of happiness for a layman. Ability in one’s occupation (utthana sampada), protection of wealth (arakkha sampada), association with good friends (kalyana mittata), expenditure in proportion to income (sama jivikata): these four are said to be conducive to the well-being of people in this world.

Many ideas for the advancement of society, as well as duties and obligations both by the family and the society for their mutual benefit, are mentioned in the discourses such as the Sigalovada, Parabhava and Vasala Sutras.

It is evident from the Dhammapada
commentary that the Buddha directed his attention even towards the serious problem of government through compassion (karuna), with a view to promoting a form of justice that would not harm and hurt the people. Justice should prevent suffering under the tyranny and the heavy taxes imposed on them by unrighteous rulers.

Buddhism teaches that a country should be governed in accordance with the Ten Duties of the King (dasa raja dharma), namely:

- liberality (dana)
- morality (sila)
- giving everything for the good of the people (pariccaga)
- honesty and integrity (ajjava)
- kindness and gentleness (maddava)
- austerity in habits (tapa)
- freedom from hatred, ill-will, enmity (akkodha)
- non-violence (avihimsa)
- patience, forbearance, tolerance, understanding (khanti), and
- non-opposition, non-obstruction, i.e. not to obstruct any measures conducive to the welfare of the people (avirodha).

In this way the Buddha and his disciples taught such important ideas pertaining to
health, sanitation, earning wealth, mutual relationships, well-being of society, and righteous government—all for the good of the people.

Madame H.P. Blavatsky, President of the Theosophical Society at the end of 18th century said, “The Buddha was the first to embody these lofty ethics in his public teachings and to make them the foundation and the very essence of his public system. It is herein that lies the immense difference between exoteric Buddhism and every other religion. For while in other religions ritualism and dogma hold the first and most important place, in Buddhism it is the ethics which have always been the most insisted upon.”

**Government**

Even the parliamentary system of today bears strong resemblance to the practices known in Buddhism. As the Marquess of Zetland, a former Viceroy of India, reveals: “It is indeed to the Buddhist books that we have to turn for an account of the manner in which the affairs of the early examples of representative self-governing institutions were conducted. And it may come as a surprise to many to learn that in the assemblies of Buddhists in India 2500 years and more ago are to be found the rudiments of our own parliamentary practice of the present day. The dignity of the assembly
was preserved by the appointment of a special officer — the embryo of Mr. Speaker in our house of commons. A second officer was appointed to see that when necessary a quorum was secured — the prototype of the Parliamentary Chief Whip in our own system. A member initiating business did so in the form of a motion which was then open to discussion. In some cases, this was done once only, in others three times, thus anticipating the practice of Parliament in requiring that a bill be read a third time before it becomes law. If discussion disclosed a difference of opinion the matter was decided upon by the vote of the majority, the voting being by ballot."

**Happiness**

This is not a religion for people just to follow but to learn, understand, and to practise to gain experience and bliss.

One day while the Buddha was walking in the forest, he took a handful of leaves and declared that what he had taught was like those leaves in his hand. The Dhamma in its entirety was like all the leaves in the whole forest. The Dhamma is so unimaginably vast that the Buddha taught only the essentials that were necessary for the immediate task at hand, namely, to end suffering and gain liberation. The Buddha told us how to rid ourselves of this suffering.
The rest of worldly knowledge is not important. Due to ignorance, we spend whole lifetimes trying to cope with suffering, worries, grievances and conflicts. This is because we do not understand the true nature of existence and the causes of suffering. For example, let us take the three characteristics of Impermanence (Anicca), Unsatisfactoriness (Dukkha), and Insubstantiality (Anatta). The whole of the Universe shares these characteristics. No power can arrest the process of change which is present from the moment we are born, and therein lies the cause of suffering. We need little else to convince us about the root problems of suffering.

What do we want out of life? How can we gain happiness? Unsatisfactoriness and consequently unhappiness comes from our not realizing that everything is changeable and subject to decay. This is the universal law. But due to our ignorance and erroneous belief in a self we want to keep living in a permanent state without ever changing. This can never happen. We want to keep our wealth, our property, our health, our youth. But one day all of these can be swept away just like the flame of a candle being snuffed out by the wind. When we notice that our beautiful good looks are being replaced by wrinkles and white hair we worry and
become unhappy because we refuse to accept the changing nature of things.

The Buddha teaches us to contemplate on these matters so that we will understand and remove the source of our unhappiness. The teaching of the Buddha has illuminated the way for mankind to cross from a world blinded by superstition, hatred and fear and reach a new world of light, love, happiness and dignity. Sir Edwin Arnold described the Buddha in this way, in his poem “Light of Asia.”

“This is the blossom on our human tree
Which opens in many a myriad years
But opened, fills the world
with wisdom’s scent
and love’s dropped honey.”

**Impermanence and Death**

When we are young we must consider that although we are young, in time we will grow old. When we are healthy we must think that in time we can fall sick. Health is not permanent. When we prepare ourselves wisely for decay, ageing, sickness and finally death, it will not be nearly as difficult to bear. Understanding that these are worldly conditions which everyone has to face, we can bear any suffering with fortitude. This is the strength, the ‘refuge’ that the Buddha promises. There are those who grumble and
cry when misfortune hits them. This is nothing but lack of understanding. Moaning about it will not make the suffering go away.

To avoid the pain that misfortune can bring we must strengthen our minds through understanding.

There is nothing or nobody who has come into existence who can escape the natural process of "coming to an end." There has to be an end. Otherwise things cannot exist. We need not be afraid of this perfectly natural phenomenon. We can all consider that even at death it is not the end of life but only the beginning of another. We know with the poet Wordsworth that, "The soul that rises with us, our life's star, has elsewhere had its setting, cometh from afar." When we disappear from this world physically, the life appears elsewhere — so why worry? Aren't we simply getting a new passport in our journey through Samsara?

Nations grow and die out; empires arise and fall apart; mighty palaces are built and crumble in the dust — such is the way of the world. Beautiful flowers blossom and attract all who pass by; but the next day they fade and dry up. Their petals all drop one by one and soon they are forgotten altogether. All enjoyments and high attainments of the world are only a momentary show. One who takes pleasure
in them has to lament and weep when they are lost, and undergoes much suffering. Since nothing lasts in this world one should not hope to get ultimate happiness from it. The Buddha's advice is to contemplate on this transitoriness of the world and the various forms of unsatisfactoriness latent in all existing worldly phenomena.

This world, the sun, the moon, galaxies, the universe itself are all subject to the same inexorable law of impermanence.

If we follow the teachings of the Buddha we will not be upset at the prospect of separating from loved ones, property and wealth. This does not mean Buddhists must not experience worldly pleasure. We must follow the Middle Path. We can gain pleasures in moderation, without violating moral principles, without becoming slaves to them but with the understanding that this must not hinder spiritual development.

Husbands and wives, parents and children develop strong attachments to each other. This is perfectly natural. It is important for them in order to lead a worldly life. At the same time however, we must face the fact that this same attachment is the source of enormous pain and suffering. It can even lead to suicide. To eradicate problems, attachment must be allowed to develop with understanding. It is
one's duty to develop affections by knowing that one day there will be separation. Under that condition one will know how to cope with separation when it happens. One will avoid madness and suicide simply because one has trained one's mind.

What the Buddha contributed to mankind was to console us by helping us to realize how all our problems arise and how to face them. Praying to external forces may lead to temporary solutions and provide transient moments of peace. But it is just like taking two painkillers when you have a headache. After three hours the pain will come back because the headache is not the sickness but merely its symptom. Painkillers are not the medicine for sickness. Those who understand are in a position to remove the cause of suffering. The Buddha's teaching gives us that understanding.

**Conclusion**

I hope this introduction has shown you how Buddhism stands alone as a system of religious practice. The Buddha was a great and effective Teacher and Physician. He constantly reminded his followers that his only aim was to teach people how to understand the nature of suffering or unsatisfactoriness and how to eradicate it. He promised happiness in this very life for
those who follow his noble method with determination and right understanding.

It is very unfortunate that in many existing religions the followers are not encouraged to respect the leaders of another religion. They are warned that if they do so they would be committing a sin and even worse, they would go to hell for it. The Buddha clearly tells us that we must respect those who are worthy of respect. Although we may not agree with certain religious points of view they hold, if they are sincere in their efforts to serve humanity and uplift it, we must respect them for it. There are noble people in every religion.

The Buddha did not advise his disciples to go and convert people who would otherwise go to hell. Rather he advised them to show the world what is right and what is wrong and to be good and to do good, to encourage men to come and see for themselves the truth that he taught.

He and his followers do not condemn the followers of other religionists as “sinners” who are doomed to spend an eternity in hell. According to Buddhists, even those who have no “religion” but who live in dignity, with compassion and goodwill can “go to heaven”, that is, experience happiness.

When we are happy and contented we
are in "heaven." When we suffer physically or mentally we are in "hell." There is no need to wait to die to experience either of these states.

Buddhism is unique because we can talk about this "religion" even without any reference to heaven or hell. I am sure that others cannot talk about religion in this way.

The Buddha's message of goodwill and understanding to all beings is a universal message. The world today needs this noble message more than ever before in the history of humankind.

Buddhism as a religion is the unique exposition of the absolute truth which will show man how to live in peace and harmony with his fellow beings.
BUDDHISM FOR THE FUTURE

DR. K. SRI DHAMMANANDA
FOREWORD

It is heartening to note that Buddhists in Malaysia are gaining recognition for their significant contribution to the world community while at the same time developing a recognizable identity of their own. While in the past Malaysians were depending on the cultures of the predominantly Buddhist countries like China, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, today Malaysians have begun a trend to merge these various traditions and evolve a distinctive Malaysian Buddhist character.

Also a sizeable number of knowledgeable Buddhists are making contributions to this new culture not only through their Dhamma talks and the organization of Buddhist activities like seminars and conferences, but also in areas such as art, literature and poetry.

The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, the oldest registered Buddhist society in Malaysia has embarked on a modest programme to publish books for the benefit of all Malaysian Buddhists. We are extremely proud that the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society has been given the honour to publish this book authored by our most Venerable teacher, Dr K Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Maha Thera, the Chief High Priest of Malaysia and Singapore.

This present volume is offered to the reader to commemorate Esala Poya which is a very important date on the Buddhist calendar. It marks the day on which the Buddha delivered
his first sermon after his Enlightenment more than 25 centuries ago.

This book by our Venerable teacher will no doubt go a long way in keeping the glorious flame of the Dhamma alight to enlighten future generations and help them attain the final bliss of Nibbana.

Committee of Management
Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society
July 2000
Buddhism for the Future

The Third Millennium

This year we, the members of the Human Race entered into what has been termed by the largely Western-dominated international media as the Third Millennium or Y2K for short. We have been subjected to an enormous amount of hype by commercial interest groups and some religious enthusiasts who promised us that the world would surely end. The ignorant, the superstitious and the fearful were especially a target for these groups. New cults sprang up threatening the wrath of a frustrated God on humanity that has consistently refused to believe in him or obey his unrealistic commands. The gullible were persuaded to part from their material wealth and even kill themselves to escape the ultimate, final holocaust of the end of the world. Then of course, there were those who made loud and strident calls to warn us of the horrors of the “millennium bug” which would wipe out modern civilization at midnight on the last day of 1999. Computers were supposed to erase information relating to when we had been insured, when we were last inoculated, that our fixed deposits interest rates would have to be renewed... the prospects were simply horrifying! Then came the great anti-climax – nothing happened! There were many shame-faced
religionists who had to run to their holy books and interpret them – once again.

Now, what was the Buddhist attitude to all of this? We did not join the mad crowd and viewed this whole situation calmly and rationally. To begin with, we remembered that we reached our second millennium five hundred years ago and we are already half way into our third millennium. That certainly gave us some greater seniority and maturity with which to view the universe and to advise our fellow beings on how to conduct ourselves in the pursuit of ultimate happiness. Perhaps we could now prevail on our younger brothers and sisters with different world views that their perspectives have motivated them to act in ways dangerous not only to the human race but to all inhabitants on this lovely planet, including plants and animals. Before we become too smug and divide the human race into “us” Buddhists and “them”, the rest, let me hasten to remind ourselves that all of us have been guilty of joining the same rat race and those who call themselves “Buddhists” have just as happily trod the “primrose path” of sensuality, materialism and greed like almost everyone else in the 20th Century. What I will proceed to discuss in the rest of this essay is how the Sublime Teachings of the Buddha, if rightly understood and correctly followed by everyone can save the human race from ultimate disaster.

We need not think that the beginning of the 21st Century had any particular, or cosmic significance in the supramudane sense. Time is
a human invention and a human being is no different today from what his ancestor was two or three thousand years ago. We humans have the same propensity for good or evil as our forebears did during the time of the Buddha. The difference may be that today, given our vast technological advances and education, we are in a better position to develop our good or evil natures. If we have the good sense to slow down and look at the Teachings without bias and practice them sincerely, we can raise the human race to high levels of divinity. If we persist in ignoring the precious teaching we will continue to give in to the beast in us. The choice is ours. The Buddha taught for all mankind. If this message can be brought to all human beings, if we can persuade all human beings and their governments that the Buddha was not bound by narrow sectarian interests, but that he was concerned with all sentient beings, we would have gone a long way towards making this world a better place for all its inhabitants. To effectively promote social harmony and universal peace through Buddhism we have some serious thinking to do. We should seriously consider what our attitude to the Buddha's message is; we must be united and not waste precious energy and resources arguing about the superiority of any particular school of Buddhism, we must recognize the rights of our fellow inhabitants on earth (including plants and animals); we must recognize the equality of all members of humanity, (including women and children). Once we have set our own house in order, so to speak, we will be in a better position to work for
the happiness and welfare of everyone just as the Buddha intended.

**Social Concerns**

A great deal has been spoken and written about the Buddha’s concern for the wellbeing of all living beings and humankind in particular. While the greater part of his ministry was devoted to the edification of those who renounced the worldly life, he was most free with his advice to uplift the condition of the householder. Some of the best known Sutras are devoted to the development of social harmony and are addressed to royalty as well as common folk. In the *Agganna Sutra* for example the Buddha speaks in mythical terms about the origin of society and the causes of inequality; in the *Kasibharadvaja Sutra* he distinguishes between labour for spiritual progress and labour to gain material wealth. In the *Sigalovada Sutra* he explains the duties and responsibilities of the different groups which comprise society – parents, children, husbands, wives, employers, employees, teachers and religious persons. He speaks of the benefits to be derived when every member of a community knows what is expected of him or her and sincerely fulfills his or her obligations. In the *Parabhava Sutra* he enumerates the various forms of antisocial behaviour which cause personal and social loss. In the *Vyagghapajja Sutra* he describes the benefits that can be gained by the householder even without “going forth”. In one section of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutra* the Buddha explains the
factors which are necessary for good government and national unity. In the *Mangala Sutra* he enumerates good social behaviour which obstructs misery and woe to the individual and thereby the community.

Beside these sutras, there are of course the numerous stories and legends recorded in the Dhammapada and the Jataka which again emphasize the factors which promote social harmony and universal peace. The question now remains to be asked, how practical are these admonitions in modern times? It has often been suggested that the Buddhist formulae for social well being are rather idealistic. They may have worked when governments exerted far more power over their subjects in ancient India than they do today. Today's citizens are too independent and selfish to be ruled with gloved hands. This need not be so. People can still be treated humanely and we can still follow the principle that if you treat people well, they will behave well. Part of the reason why governments are so harsh today is that they operate from a point of view that the world is finite and that everything is real. We must remember that all the Buddha's advice was given against a world view which is totally different from the world view of a vast majority of humans today. If we want to effectively make use of the Buddha's Teaching to promote social harmony and universal peace we must begin to see the world as the Buddha did. We must “see the world as it really is”. We must use all our efforts to give an understanding of the three characteristics of *Anicca* (impermanence),
Dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) and Anatta (non self). Admittedly this is a huge task. We have to overcome two millennia of propaganda which spread the false notion that the world and its creatures were specially created for the selfish pleasure of man. We have to counter the Renaissance notion that “man is the measure of all things.”

Surely it is a difficult task, but certainly it is not impossible. More and more people in developed countries are waking up to the obvious fact that the world was NOT made for man’s pleasure, and that it was not created in one glorious moment but that everything that exists is an illusion and dependent on everything else, that man’s ultimate happiness lies in his working not for himself alone but for the safety and happiness of others. This is exactly the Buddha’s view and a large number of people, weary of past excesses and fearful of impending disaster are ready to give heed to the Buddha’s advice on peaceful co-existence where duties and responsibilities take precedence over rights.

The time is therefore ripe for Buddhists all over the world to explain the message of the Buddha in modern terms, to help people understand the REAL nature of existence. Once there is Right (or Perfect) Understanding then naturally all other aspects of the teaching will not seem so naïve and impractical after all. Already many education systems in the west are paying due attention to the development of a culture where man is taught to put the concerns of others before his own needs. Increasingly the innate
goodness of beings is fostered through proper education and understanding. Yes, the Buddha’s model for a Perfect Society can work. But we must work intelligently and ceaselessly to make it work. A Buddhist value system is already recognizable in many organizations such as UNESCO, WHO, FAO and so on. It is of no concern to us whether or not every human being is converted to Buddhism. The Buddha has declared that we can respect any system which contains aspects of the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS which obviously these organisations do. Our concern is only for the happiness of humanity, both material and spiritual. Greater awareness of the Buddha’s teachings will make his principles universally accepted.

Unity in Buddhist Schools of Thought

To create this awareness Buddhists must adopt a two fold strategy. First we must put our own house in order. Two millennia of dissension within ourselves and aggression from outside have weakened our practice. We must look at ourselves clearly and examine what are our inner weaknesses which reduce our ability to truly practise the Buddha’s message to help our fellow beings. Ever since the First Council following the passing away of the Buddha we Buddhists have expended enormous amounts of energy to develop different schools or traditions within Buddhism. Of course this development of our divergent views took place with a degree of brotherly feeling which is unique in the history of religion. We can proudly assert again and again
that we have practiced a path of peace which is unique. We can proudly assert again and again that guided by the Master’s Teachings in the Kalama Sutra (and re-iterated in the edicts of Asoka) we have never shed a drop of blood or raised a single whip to spread our beliefs or to defend them. This record alone gives us a greater credibility over others. We have the blueprint to create universal peace.

However, let’s be realistic. While we can go on forever patting ourselves on our backs for our tolerance, the fact remains that we have gone in different directions and that we have tended to consider “our” school superior to that of others. The Buddha taught only one Path to Perfection. Our imperfections gave rise to the different schools. The time has come for us to transcend our narrow sectarian views and look forward to developing an understanding of what has been described as “Transcendental Buddhism”. This pooling of our resources, and leaving behind our culture-bound approach to the teachings, has become absolutely necessary, given the fact that the world has shrunk so much and so many people with such diverse languages, beliefs, cultures and attitudes are taking an interest in the Buddha and his teachings. All of us, who have inherited this rich treasure from various sources, must come together to help all of mankind gain ultimate happiness.

This does not mean of course that we must abandon the indescribable richness and variety of our different traditions. The world would be so much poorer if we lost the invaluable
treasures of Sri Lankan, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Tibetan and South East Asian Buddhist way of life. No, what I mean is, while we continue to foster the mundane manifestations of the teachings within our own cultures, we must vigorously make efforts to let the world hear the Buddha’s voice. This will reduce the confusion regarding the Teachings especially among people who hear it for the first time. After all, we must never lose sight of the Buddha’s first injunction to spread the Dharma for “the happiness and welfare of sentient beings”. This clearly altruistic motive for our missionary efforts must never be forgotten. To realize this ideal we must be humble and be prepared to look at the teachings of the other schools without discrimination. Members of the Sangha particularly must highlight the areas of agreement amongst the various schools so that the younger generation is helped to view Buddhism as a perfect, harmonious whole that evolved from a single teaching.

One way of doing this of course is to encourage more dialogue amongst the different traditions. The “First World Buddhist Propagation Conference” organized by the Nembutsu Sect of Japan, in Kyoto in 1998 is an excellent example of such a successful meeting of Buddhist minds. Such gatherings of prominent Buddhists from different traditions, meeting amicably, serve to remind the world that Buddhists are really united and do share identical views on such issues as enlightenment and service to mankind.
An obvious area where Buddhists can promote cooperation effectively is in the dissemination of the Dharma. Books, periodicals, magazines and more recently the Internet should all try to encourage inter-sectarian dialogue between schools of Buddhism so that readers begin to see the underlying unity of Buddhism in the apparent diversity of its practices.

**Role of Sangha**

Aside from making efforts to come together and fostering the acceptance of the concept of Transcendental Buddhism, one more area we must look at seriously to ensure our inner strength in the Buddhist world, is the Role of the Sangha. It is clear that the Buddha recognized the vital importance of the Sangha in keeping alive the purity of his Teaching. This is evidenced by the fact that he included the Sangha as the third component of the Holy Triple Gem. The Sangha's important role then and now as the transmitter of the Dharma across time and space can never be underestimated. From the Buddha's time until now the history of Buddhism has been illuminated by such glorious names as Sariputta, Moggallana, Ananda, Mahinda, Sanghamitta, Nagarjuna, Vasubhandhu, Bodhidharma, Asvaghosa, Buddhaghosa, Yuan Chuan, Fa Hsien … the list is endless. Philosophers, preachers, commentators, travellers … they all had one thing in common. They were sons and daughters of the Buddha. Even in our own times there are so many names of members of
the Sangha who keep the glorious flame of the Dharma alive, bringing the voice of the Buddha to every corner of the globe.

From the time of the Buddha right up to our own times, the members of the Sangha have been the force which sustained and interpreted the Buddhaword so that it is kept ever alive and fresh in the hearts and minds of men and women. So much for their importance. Let us now look at their function in today's society and the challenges that they face.

Although there have been great monks who went far beyond the monasteries in which they first donned the mendicants' garb, the vast majority of monks never strayed beyond their monastery walls. They were content to live quiet secluded lives of contemplation avoiding as much as possible the turmoil of the outside world. But as we reach the end of the twentieth century we cannot ignore the fact that the world is indeed very different from what it was for centuries, particularly in Asia. The world is creeping very much into the monastery. The monk is increasingly called upon to serve the society which supports his material needs. It is no longer enough to conduct the occasional devotional practices for the lay person or teach the rudiments of reading and writing and calculation to his children. The world has shrunk. Events which occur in the US or Europe deeply affect the lives of everyone on the planet. The Buddhist monk is part of that global life. Social harmony and Universal Peace are the responsibility of everyone on this planet: the
Buddhist monk must carry out his part of that responsibility. The obvious exception to this is of course, the bhikkhu of the Forest tradition, who completely renounces all contact with society and seeks salvation for himself. The monastery monk does not fall into this category.

Not only in Asia, but in Europe, the Americas, Australia, and increasingly, even in Africa, Buddhism is playing a vital role in contributing to social harmony and universal peace. The Buddhist monks or nuns are the vital links between the Buddha’s message of peace and harmony and the people of the world who so desperately need it.

Is the Sangha ready for the challenge?

My immediate and honest answer to that is “No. At least not yet”.

To begin with, traditional life in rural Asia has changed very little over the centuries. But at the same time, technological and urban developments and westernization have moved ahead at dizzying speeds. The result: the average buddhist in a traditional buddhist country (possibly with the exception of Japan) has become increasingly disoriented and there exists a vast gap within him, between his traditional values and his modern concept of the world with its banking systems, sensational entertainment, materialism, nuclear families and so on. He is torn between what he is “told” he should be as a model buddhist parent, son, employee or citizen, and the demands made on
him in the real world: the world of materialism, greed and selfishness. Too often, the Sangha is ill-equipped to help their lay supporters to bridge the gap between the modern and the traditional. The average modern monk in a Buddhist country is found to be woefully out of touch with the modern world. It is more likely he has not even seen a computer, let alone being proficient to operate one! He has very little contact with the outside world, so how can he help his fellow beings to cope with it?

What is interesting to note here is that this has not always been so. Who can deny that a Buddhist monk has always been an agent of change for the better throughout history? Who can deny that it was the Buddhist monk who brought Art, Architecture, Technology, Music and Medicine to every country in Asia? It has even been suggested that the ancient Egyptian THERAPEUTAE who practised monasticism and specialized in healing ("therapeutic") were originally Buddhist monks, therapeutic being a corruption of THERAVADA! Be that as it may, the Sangha civilized the ancient world. But they can hardly be held up as role models for change today! What happened? Of course we can point a finger at colonization, but blaming others for our shortcomings is a luxury we can ill afford. The only thing we can do is to ask ourselves how we can change the situation and once again make the Buddhist monk the leader of men and women in his society.

I believe the key is in Education. Governments as well as social reformers in Buddhist countries
must recognize the tremendous potential that members of the Sangha have to help their fellow beings. They are generally highly intelligent as can be seen by their ability to memorize, understand, interpret and teach the Sublime Dhamma. While continuing to uphold these traditional forms of learning, we must give them additional skills – computer-literacy, farming techniques, counseling, engineering, nursing, teaching for example. They must not only be proficient in the Dharma, they must be practical in serving society's material needs. Over the centuries the Saffron robe has earned its wearer a high degree of respect. Today the Buddhist monk can make use of this psychological tool to help laymen become better people. It must never be forgotten that the Buddha never condemned material prosperity. There are enough Sutras in our scriptures to show that the Buddha even went to the extent of declaring that wealth, honestly earned, gave a person self esteem, human dignity and the power to do good. The buddhist monk who helps his lay devotee to attain material success WITH RIGHT UNDERSTANDING is indeed following his Master's injunction to work for the benefit and welfare of humanity.

All of this however could possibly lead to a further problem. And that is, we could have monks who are trained without understanding. They could go to the other extreme and cut off all links with the past. (It has happened!) No, monks have an all important role to uphold tradition. Tradition links us to the past. It gives us our roots, it helps us to remain steady against
the onslaught of alien cultures, alien religious practices and alien values. The monk must be so steeped in and proud of his significant traditions that he imbues his devotees with that same love and pride in his own culture. Can it be done? Of course! Just look at Japan.

This is one area where the Sangha can perform a useful function as a factor in promoting harmony by contributing to the success of that society economically.

**The Bhikkhuni Order**

Another area which is worth looking into is the Bhikkhuni Order. I am certainly aware that this is still a thorny issue among some quarters, but I am convinced that there are fewer people around who cannot see the importance of the Bhikkhuni Sangha. It is again a matter of great pride to us, that the Buddha was the first religious teacher to constitute the component of female monasticism. While it cannot be denied that he had some well-founded initial reservations, he did give in to Ananda. What is generally (conveniently?) overlooked is that the organization spread like wildfire, almost literally, as soon as it was instituted, showing the tremendous spiritual need women had for upliftment. It is also a matter of record (to the eternal credit of the Buddha) that once accepted, women had no difficulty whatsoever in achieving the highest pinnacles of spiritual achievements human beings are capable of.
Patacara, Khema, Kisagotami, Dhammadinna, Uppalavanna, Visakha. . . need one continue?

Today, women have proven that they are capable of becoming Presidents, Prime Ministers and Scientists as well as teachers and nurses, women are equal partners in every field of human endeavour. It is time, therefore that Buddhists recognize the tremendous contributions women can make to the promotion of Social Harmony and Universal Peace. In fact women have made contributions to both these areas and they can do so today. It is of course a credit to the Buddha’s Teaching on this matter that the first woman prime minister of the world was a Buddhist woman from Sri Lanka. A belief that as nuns, Buddhist women have an undeniable role to play especially in harnessing the female workforce and playing an efficient and intelligent part in human development. Their contribution can be invaluable as teachers, nurses, counselors, in fact, as anything, to effect social change. The voice of the women can no longer be ignored as a voice to seek and promote International Peace. As mothers they are better qualified than anybody else to speak against the sacrifice of sons and husbands on the altars of war.

The Sangha male and female, if properly trained and conversant in many languages and skilled in many disciplines, can be a powerful force in the development of peace. Thanks to world leaders like HH the Dalai Lama, the Buddhist monk has always been a symbol of peace even among non buddhists. What is necessary now is for
buddhist monks and nuns the world over to equip themselves with the skills needed to spread the Buddha’s message of peace to all mankind. Given our past history of non-violence, we are better qualified than anyone else to encourage everyone to practice the “love thy neighbour” policy.

The Lay Person

In a wider sense the Sangha comprises not only Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis but Upasakas and Upasikas (male and female lay devotees) as well. Given the admirable spirit of democracy proclaimed and practised by the Buddha, the members of the Sangha as well as lay people have duties and responsibilities towards the development of Social Harmony and Universal Peace. There are today upasakas and upasikas who are performing an invaluable service in spreading the Buddha’s message in the world. This is especially true in non-traditional buddhist countries like Malaysia and Singapore where lay devotees are leading their friends to practice the noble Teachings by leading fellow buddhists along the Path. They even build and run Viharas, Orphanages, Old Folks Homes, Clinics to serve the community. In the Western, developed countries also lay buddhists will play an increasingly important role to promote International Peace in the world, although perhaps they may not be needed as much in areas of social development. This does not mean however that the Sangha will be replaced by lay workers in the cause of Buddhism either
in the near or distant future. The Sangha will and must continue to play an important role not only as guardians of the Dharma but also as a role models and teachers of the lay people in matters pertaining to Buddhism. This of course further emphasizes the point that the Sangha must be capable of taking on this added responsibility of training lay people for Dhammaduta work.

**Buddhism as a force against war**

Still on the theme of International Peace, religious leaders have an increasingly important role to play in teaching their followers to walk in the path of peace. Sadly however, the history of mankind is replete with examples of so called religious people who waged war in the name of religion. Buddhism never has and never can ever condone war even if it is disguised as a “just” or “holy” war. The Buddha condemned violence of any kind for whatever reason. He repeatedly declared that the only victory is the conquest of self and the only miracle is the conversion from evil to good. Buddhists therefore, Sangha and lay people alike, are bound by precedent and precept never to wage war but to persuade all people to walk the path of Peace. It is certainly not an accident therefore that the UNESCO Charter begins with the preamble: “Since it is in the minds of men that wars are created, it is in the minds of men that the fortresses against war must be erected”. This is almost exactly like the very first verse of the Dhammapada which states:
“Mind precedes all wholesome and unwholesome states and is their chief; they are all mind wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, misery follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox”.

If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one's shadow that never leaves. The teaching of the Buddha, if inculcated in the young mind from the beginning, will no doubt be a powerful civilizing factor that will turn humanity from violence to compassion. One of our tasks therefore is to make available the teachings of Buddha in more languages and through various media, including the Internet.

Although the human race has made such tremendous progress in almost every field of endeavour, warfare is one area in which we have behaved no better than animals. In fact one might even say that we have even descended lower than animals because given our higher intelligence we should know better than to succumb to our lower instincts of lust, anger, hatred and delusion. It has been said that man’s worst characteristic is his ability to inflict pain – mental and physical – on his fellow beings. The worst manifestation of this irrational behaviour is man’s tendency to wage war on the flimsiest of excuses. Ever since man learnt to hold a weapon he has waged war against his fellow beings, and any student of history will readily agree that there never has been such a thing as a “just war”. And wars get from bad to
worse. At least in the past, wars were only waged between men silly enough to get involved on the battlefields. But today whole hordes of innocent men, women, children and even animals suffer indescribable privations as a result of war. Mothers are separated from children, husbands are separated from wives, brothers are separated from sisters – there is no end.

Some people argue that conflict and war cannot be avoided because they are expressions of human nature. I am realistic enough to realize that it would be foolhardy to sit down and do nothing when aggressors are brutally destroying innocent lives on the basis of unrealistic and unfounded claims, but we must always bear in mind that war is at best a last resort to maintain peace. However, if we believe that war is inevitable, then we will wage war. But if, like the great emperor Asoka, we have the spiritual development and the wisdom to see the folly of war we can certainly avoid it. Buddhists can be very proud of the fact that in our own times the greatest advocate of peace is His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet. For nearly half a century this great Buddhist leader has worked tirelessly to regain his homeland, without once uttering a malicious word against those who occupy his land. He has never condemned them but treated them as fellow-beings. On the other hand, he has not been a coward either. He has fearlessly spoken against the ill-treatment of his subjects and the lies spread against him. But he has not chosen to take arms against his people’s aggressors. This is because he lives
by the advice of the Buddha given in the Dhammapada,

"Hatred does not end by hatred
By love alone it is quelled".

A struggle which is ended by force is no victory. Real victory can only be attained by a true change of heart founded on understanding on the part of the aggressor. His Holiness the Dalai Lama truly believes in inculcating peace through non violence.

We are all familiar with the story of how during the time of the Buddha a prince called Vidudabha annihilated the entire Sakya clan simply because he harboured a grudge against them for a slight insult. We have to learn from that example and seek rather to follow in the footsteps of the great king whose name was changed from Chanda (cruel) Asoka to Dhamma (righteous) Asoka because he had the wisdom to walk the path shown by the Buddha. Let us also recall the Buddha's declaration that the people of a certain kingdom could not be overcome by force because they followed the seven conditions for the progress of a nation. These examples show that war is avoidable if we truly wish it. There is a principle of Modern Management today which declares that if we expect Zero Defects in our operations we will achieve them. Similarly if we envisage a society without war, we will achieve peace. Unfortunately we have been so indoctrinated to believe that war is the only way to get what we want, that we will continue to wage war. The
most horrible irony of it is that people even wage
wars in the name of religions which teach the
brotherhood of man.

Therefore the greatest challenge facing us in the
next millenium is to grow up, to stop fighting like
small boys and heed the word of the
Enlightened One:

All fear death,
All fear the rod,
Knowing this we should never strike
Nor cause to strike.

Proselytization

The world today is divided by many factors. Sad
to say one of the most important of the
organizations responsible for these many
divisions is religion. Today, perhaps like at no
other time in history, are the vast resources of
certain religious organizations being exploited
shamelessly in a mad scramble to win converts
at any cost. These include the spreading of
malicious lies against other religions like
Buddhism. Young, innocent impressionable
people are being lured away from their
traditional religion through blatant false
propaganda and even through bribes. There are
instances of whole villages in certain countries
being converted en masse through the promise
of material gain. Conversion in itself may not be
a bad thing, but when methods employed and
the motives for converting are suspect then we
must not stand idly by and do nothing about it.
In many countries conversions which are not accompanied by a full understanding of what is being accepted can lead to serious problems, often causing the breakup of marriages and families and other social problems. Therefore it is not conversion but buying people.

There is therefore an urgent need for Buddhists to seek the dialogue with other religious groups to voice our dissatisfaction with their activities. There are genuine members of these faiths who are themselves embarrassed by the antics of their fellow religionists. They must speak against their own kind and Buddhists must make every effort to urge them to do so. In the past, traditional religions were the victims of colonial missionaries. Today, the problem is much more insidious – citizens of the same country are working to undermine the traditional cultures and practices of their forefathers and introducing alien ways to their people, separating parents and children, the old and the young.

**Ecumenism**

On a more positive note, however, Buddhists have always been encouraged, in the KALAMA SUTRA for example, to seek dialogue with others to show respect for other genuine seekers after the truth. We need to talk with other religionists formally and informally to know how they think, to show them how we think and to find common ground on which we can cooperate to work for the betterment of the human race. In some cases we must even be
humble enough to admit that we can adopt their methods particularly in social and charity work and help the poor and the weak and helpless in every corner of the world.

**Buddhist Values**

Having examined some of the challenges facing buddhists today and how we can help to promote peace and social harmony let us examine how we can identify some Buddhist values which we will need to achieve our goals.

It cannot be said that there are "Buddhist Values" which are unique to Buddhism and not to be found in other religious systems. The Buddha recognized this when he declared that we must accept and recognize the worth of any religion in so far as that religion contains the Four Noble Truths. What is unique about Buddhism is our UNDERSTANDING of the nature of these values and why we practice them. When the Bodhisatta practised the Ten Paramis, he was motivated in an entirely different way than any other follower of a spiritual path either in part or as a whole.

The ten paramis – dana (generosity), sila (precept), nekkhamma (renunciation), panna (wisdom), viriya (energy), khanti (patience) sacca (truthfulness), adhitthana (determination), metta (loving kindness) and upekkha (equanimity) – can form a solid value system on which a Buddhist builds his or her personal spiritual life. This individual effort is then
extended to members of the family, the community, the nation and finally the world as a whole. All Buddhists all over the world must consciously make the effort to understand the importance of practising these values, endeavour to practice them earnestly, and then explain them to others. Our education system and our media network must spread these values through every means possible so that our daily thinking is affected by them. We all know the famous Jataka tale in which the Bodhisatta advises his acrobat master. To ensure perfect safety each performer must be fully concerned about his own welfare and security first. In that way both parties will be safe. Therefore the implementing of a Buddhist value-system involves making each individual understand his responsibility towards the rest, to understand the interrelatedness of all beings, to guard him or herself and thereby guard others.

The year 2000 holds many promises and challenges for all members of the human race. Buddhists are in a particularly strong position to help all human beings realize their full potential and live in peace and harmony not only with themselves but with others as well. It is our duty to help spread the Buddha’s message by spreading it through the written and spoken word, but, far more importantly through the example of living noble lives in accordance with the sacred Teachings.

May you all be well and happy.
“Wherever the Buddha’s teachings have flourished, either in cities or countrysides, people would gain inconceivable benefits. The land and people would be enveloped in peace. The sun and moon will shine clear and bright. Wind and rain would appear accordingly, and there will be no disasters. Nations would be prosperous and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons. People would abide by morality and accord with laws. They would be courteous and humble, and everyone would be content without injustices. There would be no thefts or violence. The strong would not dominate the weak and everyone would get their fair share.”

THE BUDDHA SPEAKS OF THE INFINITE LIFE SUTRA OF ADORNMENT, PURITY, EQUALITY AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE MAHAYANA SCHOOL
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~
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Document Serial No: 105407

Book Title: Buddhism for the Future

Book No.,書號：EN119

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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!

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財團法人佛陀教育基金會 印贈
台北市杭州南路一段五十五號十一樓

Printed and donated for free distribution by
The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation
11F., 55 Hang Chow South Road Sec 1, Taipei,
Taiwan, R.O.C.
Tel: 886-2-23951198, Fax: 886-2-23913415
Email: overseas@budaedu.org
Website: http://www.budaedu.org
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Printed in Taiwan
6,000 copies; September 2016
EN119-14440