Wheel Publication No. 294

The Buddhist Layman

Four essays

R. Bogoda
Susan Elbaum Jootla
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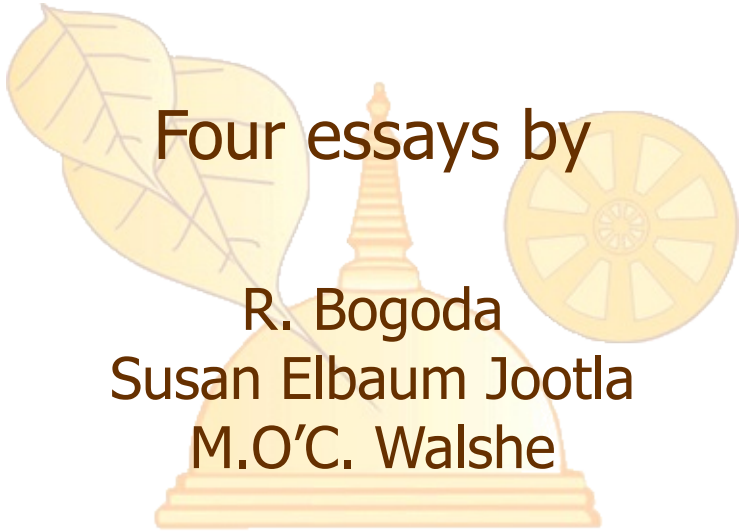

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Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka

The Wheel Publication No. 294

Dedicated to the memory of a great Buddhist Layman, S.F. de Silva (1902–1981)

First Edition: 1982

Contents

The Lotus-like Lay-follower

Thus spoke the Buddha:

> A lay-follower (*upāsaka*) who has five qualities is a jewel of a lay-follower, is like a lily, like a lotus. What are these five qualities? He has faith; he is virtuous; he is not superstitious; he believes in action (*kamma*) and not in luck or omen; he does not seek outside (of the Order) for those worthy of support and does not attend there first.
>
> —AN 5.175

Ten Virtues of the Lay-follower

These ten, great King, are the virtues of the lay-follower:

1. He shares the joys and sorrows of the Order; [1]
2. He places the Dhamma first; [2]
3. He enjoys giving according to his ability;
4. If he sees a decline in the Dispensation of the

Teaching of the Buddha, he strives for its strong growth;

5. He has right views, disregarding belief in superstitions and omens; he will not accept any other teacher, not even for the sake of his life;
6. He guards his deeds and words;
7. He loves and cherishes peace and concord;
8. He is not envious or jealous;
9. He does not live a Buddhist life by way of deception or hypocrisy;
10. He has gone for refuge to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

—Milindapañhā, Ch. IV

Principles of Lay Buddhism

by R. Bogoda

Introduction

Buddhism should not be thought to be a teaching for monks only, as it is sometimes wrongly conceived. In a large number of his discourses, the Buddha has given practical guidance for the lay life and sound advice to cope with life's difficulties. Many of our problems and difficulties for which some people blame circumstances and chance, are, if correctly viewed, the result of ignorance or negligence. They could be well avoided or overcome by knowledge and diligence, yet of course, worldly happiness and security are never perfect; they are always a matter of degree, for in the fleeting there is nothing truly firm.

The central problem of a lay Buddhist is how to combine personal progress in worldly matters with moral principles. He strives to achieve this by building his life on the foundation of the Fourth Noble Truth, the Noble Eightfold Path, and to shape his activities in accordance with it. The first step of this Path is Right Understanding; by developing a life style in accordance with it, the other factors of the Path

result from it, namely: Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. The eight steps of the Path fall into the three divisions of Wisdom (the first two), Morality (the second three), and Mental Culture (the last three). The order of development is, however, Morality (*sīla*), Mental Culture (*samādhi*), and Wisdom (*paññā*). The Path outlines the practice of Buddhism, leading to its ultimate goal—Nibbāna.

As a householder, the Buddhist is particularly concerned with Morality. Right Understanding, however, is the prerequisite. Right Effort is the training of the will, and Right Mindfulness, the all-round helper. Progress, to a lay Buddhist, means the development of the whole man in society. It is, therefore, an advance on many fronts—the economic, the moral, and the spiritual, the first, not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end: the full flowing of the human being in the onward-carrying stream of Buddhist ideas and ideals.

A Practical Guide

Right Understanding is the beginning and the end of Buddhism, without which, one's vision is dimmed and the way is lost, all effort misguided and misdirected. Right Understanding, in the context of the layman's Dhamma, provides a sound philosophy of life.

Right Understanding, the first step of the Path, is seeing life

as it really is: the objective understanding of the nature of things as it truly is (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*). All things that have arisen, including the so-called being, are nothing but incessant change (*anicca*), therefore unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and productive of suffering. It follows then that what is both impermanent and pain-laden cannot conceal within it anything that is solid, substantial, or unchanging—an eternal soul or an imminent abiding principle (*anattā*).

Right Understanding implies further a knowledge of the working of kamma—the moral law of cause and effect. We reap what we sow, in proportion to the sowing. Good begets good and evil, evil. Kamma operates objectively, and the results show themselves here or in the hereafter. That is to say, consequences follow causes whether one believes in kamma or not, even as a fall from a height will result in injury or even death, irrespective of one's personal belief or disbelief in the force of gravity.

Kamma is intentional or volitional action; *vipāka* is the fruit or result, and every action affects character for good or bad. We know that actions consciously performed again and again tend to become unconscious or automatic habits. They, in turn, whether good or bad, become second nature. They more or less shape or mould the character of a person. Likewise, the unconscious or latent tendencies in us, including inborn human instincts, are merely the results of actions done repeatedly in innumerable past lives extending far beyond childhood and the formative years of the present life. Kamma includes both past and present action. It is

neither fate nor predestination.

A Buddhist views life in terms of cause and effect, his own birth included. Existence (life) was not thrust on him by an unseen Deity to whose will he must blindly bend nor by parents, for the mere fusing of two cells from mother and father does not by itself produce life. It was of his own causing of his own choice: the kammic energy generated from the past birth produced life—made real the potential, in the appropriate sperm and ovum of his human parents at the moment of conception, endowing the new life with initial consciousness (*paṭisandhiviññāṇa*), using the mechanism of heredity, duly modified, if necessary.

The arising of a being here then means the passing away of another elsewhere. This changing personality that constitutes "me"—the physical and mental make-up that is "I"—the very environment into which I was born, in which I acted and reacted is more of my own doing, of my own choice, of my own kamma, of one's past actions and thoughts. It is just, it is fair, it is right; what is, is the sum of what *was*; effects exactly balance causes. One gets precisely what one deserves, even as the sum of two plus two is four, never more nor less.

Enough of the past that is dead. What remains is the ever-present *now*, not even the future that's still unborn. The past is dead, yet influences the present, but does not determine it. The past and the present, in turn, influence the future that is yet to be. Only the present is real. The responsibility of

using the present for good or bad lies with each individual. And the future, still unborn, is one's to shape. The so-called being which, in fact, is merely a conflux of mind and matter, is, therefore, born of, supported by, and heir to, his kamma.

One is driven to produce kamma by *taṇhā* or desire which itself is threefold. Where there is *taṇhā*, there is ignorance (*avijjā*)—blindness to the real nature of life; and where there is ignorance, there is *taṇhā* or craving. They coexist, just as the heat and light of a flame are inseparable. And the beginning of ignorance (*avijjā*) cannot be known.

Because of this lack of understanding of things as they truly are, we, often unmindful of the rights of others, desire for, grasp at, cling to, the wrong sorts of things: the pleasures that money can buy, power over others, fame and name, wishing to go on living forever. We hope that pleasures will be permanent, satisfying and solid, but find them to be passing, unsatisfying, and empty—as hollow as a bamboo when split. The result is frustration and disappointment, dis-ease and an irritating sense of inadequacy and insufficiency. If we don't get all our wishes, we react with hate or take shelter in a world of delusive unreality or fantasy.

To remedy this, we must correct our understanding and thinking, and see in our own experiences, so near to us, things as they truly are, and first reduce, and finally remove all shades of craving or desire that are the causes of this restlessness and discontent. This is not easy, but when one

does so by treading the noble Eightfold path, one reaches a state of perfection and calm (Nibbāna) thereby bringing to an end the pain-laden cycle of birth and death.

As long as there is desire, birth leads to death, and death to birth, even as an exit is also an entrance. Each subsequent individual born is not the same as the preceding one, nor is it entirely different (*naca so naca aññ̃o*) but only a continuity; that is to say, each succeeding birth depends upon, or emerges from, the preceding one. And both, birth and death, are but the two sides of the same coin, life. The opposite of life is not death, as some fondly believe, but rest —the rest and peace of Nibbāna, in contrast to the restlessness and turmoil that is life.

Kamma, as we have seen, is volitional action. It implies making choices or decisions between, broadly speaking, skilful (*kusala*) and unskilful (*akusala*) actions. The former are rooted in generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom leading to happiness and progress, and therefore, to be cultivated again and again in one's life. The good actions are Generosity, Morality, Meditation, Reverence, Service, Transference of merit, Rejoicing in other's good actions, Hearing the Doctrine, Expounding the Doctrine, and Straightening one's views. The unskilled actions are rooted in greed, hate and delusion, leading to pain, grief and decline, and therefore, to be avoided. There are ten such actions: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, harsh speech, gossip, covetousness, ill-will and false views. This division of actions is a natural outcome of

the Universal Law of Kamma; Kamma is one of the fixed orders of existence.

Life is like a ladder. The human being occupies the middle steps. Above are the celestial worlds of bliss; below, the woeful states of sorrow. With every choice, one moves upward or downward, ascends or descends, for each one is evolved according to one's own actions. Beings are not only owners of kamma but also their heirs. Actions fashion not only one's fortune, how one shall be born, dividing beings into inferior or superior, in health, wealth, wisdom, and the like, but also shapes one's future, where one shall be born, whether in the human, heavenly or animal world. In short, one can progress or regress from the human state.

A proper understanding of the Buddhist doctrine of kamma and rebirth can, therefore, improve and elevate the character of a person. Buddhism teaches, above all, moral responsibility—to be mindful of one's actions, because of the inevitability of action being followed by reaction. One therefore strives one's best to avoid evil and to do good for one's own welfare, as well as for the benefit of others. This conduct leads to peace within and without. It promotes soberness of mind and habit together with self-respect and self-reliance. Finally, this teaching fosters in us a feeling of all-embracing kindness and tolerance toward all living beings and keeps us away from cruelty, hate, and conflict.

Man, as a whole, has not made a steady progress toward moral and spiritual perfection. But the individual can

pursue the ideal of a perfect man—the Arahant—free from greed, hate, and delusion, by treading the Noble Eightfold Path comprising Sublime Conduct, Mental Culture and Intuitive Insight (or wisdom). It is the perfection of human living by perfecting one's understanding and purifying one's mind. It is to *know* the Truth, *do* the Truth and *become* the Truth. Such a one has gone beyond the force of *all* rebirth-producing kamma, skilful and unskilful. He has attained the highest—Nibbāna.

As the Blessed One teaches with incomparable beauty:

Sabba pāpassa akaraṇam,
kusalassa upasampada
sacittapariyodapanaṃ:
etam Buddhanusāsanam

To avoid evil,
To do good,
To purify the mind,
This is the advice of all the Buddhas.

This, in brief and simple outline, is the Teaching of the Buddha as it affects the householder's life. It is at once an ideal and a method. As an ideal, it aims at the evolution of a perfect Man—synonymous with the attainment of Nibbāna—in this very life itself, by one's own efforts. As a method, it teaches us that the ideal can become real only by the systematic practice and development of the Noble Eightfold Path, at the two levels—that of the monk and that of the

layman. Each develops according to his ability and each according to his needs, whereby man, using the instrument of mind, by his own endeavour, comes to *know* himself, *train* himself, and *free* himself from the thraldom of base desire, the blindness of hate, and the mist of a delusive self, to win the highest of all freedoms—freedom from error and ignorance.

In this Noble Teaching, there is no intellectual error, based as it is on reason and, in keeping with the finding of science, no moral blindness; for its ethics are truly lofty, with a rational basis: namely, evolution in terms of kamma.

That Buddhism is eminently practicable is clearly shown by the example of the great Indian Emperor Asoka, when Buddhism became the shaping ideal of the State, and Buddhist ideas and ideals were used to build a just and righteous society. Thus ushering in a period of great prosperity, material, moral, and spiritual. It is the only true solution to the manifold problems in the modern world. To this we must now turn.

Social and Economic Aspects

Buddha was a rebel. He rebelled against the way of thought, and the way of life, of his age.

To the philosophical concept of life as dynamic change (*anicca*) of no being but becoming (*bhava*), no thinker but thought, no doer but deed—he added its social equivalent:

the doctrine of social fluidity and equality based on nobility of conduct. As the Buddha stated:

> Not by birth is one an outcaste
> Not by birth is one a Brahman.
> By deeds is one an outcaste,
> By deeds is one a Brahman.

and again,

> A birth no Brahman, nor non-Brahman makes;
> 'Tis life and doing that mold the Brahman true.
> Their lives mould farmers, tradesmen, merchants, serfs;
> Their lives mold robbers, soldiers, chaplains, kings.

What matters then is not the womb from which one came nor the societal class into which one was born, but the moral quality of one's actions. As a tree is judged by its fruit, so shall a man be judged by his deeds.

In this way, the doors of the Deathless and of the unconditioned freedom beyond, and of social freedom here on earth, were thrown open to all, regardless of caste, colour, or class. In his teaching all men unite, lose identity, even as do the waters of the rivers that flow into the sea. No caste, class, or race privileges existed among his lay followers or in the Order of the Sangha that he founded—a fitting complement to the doctrine of *anattā*.

For the Buddha, all men are one in that they belong to one

species. Social classes and castes are nothing but functional or occupational groupings, neither fixed nor inevitable. They are divisions of society, man-made, subject to change and resulting from social and historical factors. A social doctrine based on the alleged superiority of any caste, class, or race, and advocating to keep it dominant by the use of force, must necessarily lead to the perpetuation of social tensions and conflict, and will never bring about harmony and the fraternity of men.

The Buddha's doctrine of equality does not, however, imply that all men are alike physically or mentally. That would be identity. It does mean that each one should be treated equally with human dignity, and given an equal chance to develop the faculties latent in each, as all are capable of moral and spiritual progress, and of human perfection, in view of the common capacity and capability of humanity. Thus the Buddha's teaching of a classless society requires the progressive refinement of man's nature, as shown by his actions, and the development of his character.

The Buddha was not only the first thinker in known history to teach the doctrine of human equality, but also the first humanist who attempted to abolish slavery, in which term is also included the traffic in, and the sale of, females for commercial purposes. In fact, this is a prohibited trade for his followers.

The character of a society depends on the beliefs and practices of its people as well as on its economy. An

economic system based on Buddhist ethics and principles, therefore, seems the only alternative. The true nature of man is that he is not only a thinking and feeling creature, but also a striving creature, with higher aspirations and ideals. If he is aggressive and assertive, he is also cooperative and creative. He is forever making not only things, but himself. And the making of oneself by perfecting the art of living, is the noblest of all creative aspirations, yielding the highest happiness and satisfaction in life.

Progress in the material side of life alone is not enough for human happiness, as illustrated by today's "affluent societies." The pursuit of material pleasures, in the hope that by multiplying them they will thereby become permanent, is a profitless chase, akin to chasing one's shadow: the faster one runs, the faster it eludes. True happiness, contentment, and harmony come from an emancipated mind. Any economic system is therefore, unsatisfactory, if based on a wrong set of values and attitudes, and will fail in the fulfilment of its promises.

The only effective remedy for the economic and social ills of the modern world is a more rational and balanced economic structure based on Buddhist ideas and ideals. In a Buddhist economic system [3] the people deliberately use the state power to maximize welfare, both economic and social, from a given national income. The methods employed are threefold: economic planning, a suitable fiscal policy, and a comprehensive network of social services. Thus assuring to every member of the community, as a right, and as a badge

of citizenship and fellowship, the essentials of civilized living, such as minimum standards of economic security, health care, housing, and education, without which a citizen cannot realize his humanity in full.

In such a system, production, distribution, and values take a different meaning in a new context. Economic activity will be pursued, not as an end in itself, but a means to an end—the all-round development of man himself. There should be a revision of values. A person's worth, for instance, ought not be measured in terms of what he *has* but on what he *is*. In short, man or the majority of men in society should be helped to see life in perspective. Knowledge and discipline may transform a society into a workshop or a military camp, but it is the cultivation of a proper sense of values that will make it truly civilized. Perhaps this may be the clue to the paradox of the Western civilization that knows how to go through space and sail across the seas, but not how to live on earth in peace. It is true that such a change of heart and system may, in the present context of the world, take a long time to realize. But what else is the alternative? It is futile to think that reform by revolution will remedy the ills of the world.

In the opening stanza of the Dhammapada the Buddha declared the supremacy of mind over matter: "Mind precedes things, dominates them, creates them" (*Mano pubbaṅgamadhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā*).

However, this must not be interpreted to mean that

Buddhism is against social and economic reform. It is far from it. Buddhism stands for a society of equals, in which justice and ethical principles shall supplant privilege and chaos. But reform must take place by peaceful persuasion and education, without resorting to violence; worthy aims must be realized by worthy means, even as democracy must be maintained by the methods of democracy.

Buddhism concedes that the economic environment influences character, but denies that it determines it. A person can use his free will, within limits, and act according to his conscience irrespective of the social structure to which he belongs. It all depends on mind and its development.

Society does not stand still. Like any other conditioned phenomenon, it changes constantly and Buddhism teaches us that we cannot change society as something different from its members. Social progress is their progress, social regress their regress. If the individual perfects his life, thinks and acts clearly, lives in accordance with the Dhamma and the moral law of kamma, to that extent will there be social order and discipline. Initial improvements from within will result in corresponding changes without. Social order and discipline follow, not preceded, the state of mind of the individuals comprising that society. Society reflects the character of its people; the better the people, the better the society. Every society is a projection or extension of the collective personality of its members.

But humanity in the mass can be influenced for good by the

example of a few really noble and selfless men with vision and wisdom, with ideas and ideals to live for and to die for. They provide the guiding star round which others, too timid to lead but strong enough to follow, cluster around and become willing followers. It is these few who set the standards for the many at the bottom, and their impact and influence on the way of life, and thought, of the human race can be tremendous. The message they bring carries with it the indelible stamp of truth and is, therefore, never obsolete.

Most outstanding among the great teachers is the Buddha Gotama. It is through his Teachings that all the Buddhist nations, including Sri Lanka, were molded, and into the fabric of national life were woven the strands of his Teaching.

It is then the duty of every genuine Buddhist to help to make known, far and wide, the Teaching of the Buddha in all its many aspects, and thereby make possible tomorrow the seemingly impossible of today—a new and just socio-economic order based on Buddhist ethics, principles, and practices. Such a society will be both democratic and socialistic, with liberty, equality, fraternity, and economic security for all, not as ends in themselves but as means to an end—the full development of man into a well-rounded, happy human being in the setting of the Teaching of Gotama the Buddha, Guide Incomparable to a troubled world.

Buddhism and Daily Life

A follower of the Buddha learns to view life realistically, which enables him to adjust to everything that comes his way. Buddhism tells him the meaning and purpose of existence and his place in the scheme of things. It suggests the lines of conduct, supported by cogent reasons, by which he should live his daily life. It clarifies what his attitude should be to specific matters like self, job, sex, and society. Thus it assists him in the business of living, for to lead a full life four fundamental adjustments have to be made. He must be happily adjusted to himself and the world, his occupation, his family, and his fellow beings.

(a) Himself and the World

A Buddhist tries to see things as they really are. He remembers the instability of everything and understands the inherent danger in expecting to find permanence in existence. In this way, he strives to insulate himself from potential disappointments. So, a discerning lay Buddhist is not unduly elated or upset by the eight worldly conditions of gain and loss, honour and dishonour, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. He does not expect too much from others, nor from life, and recognizes that it is only human to have one's share of life's ups and downs.

He looks at life's events in terms of cause and effect, however unpleasant or painful they may be. An understanding layman accepts dukkha as the results of his own kamma—probably a past unskilful (*akusala*) action

ripening in the present.

He sees the connection between craving and suffering and therefore tries to reduce both the intensity and variety. As the Dhammapada states:

> From craving springs grief,
> from craving springs fear,
> For him who is wholly free from craving,
> there is no grief—whence fear?
>
> —Dhp 215

Therefore, he is mindful of a scale of values—knowing clearly what is really important to him as a Buddhist layman, what is desirable but not so important, and what is trivial. He tries to eliminate the non-essential and learns to be content with the essential. Such a person soon discovers that to need less is to live better and happier. It is a mark of maturity. It is progress on the path to inner freedom.

One should wisely seek and carefully choose in one's actions and strive to maintain a Buddhist standard of conduct, whatever disappointments life may bring. And when disappointments come, one tries to look at them with some degree of detachment, standing, as it were, apart from them. In this way, a person gains a feeling of inner security and frees himself from fears, anxieties, and many other heavy burdens. This attitude to life and the world brings courage and confidence.

How does a lay Buddhist view himself? In the Buddha Dhamma, the human being is an impersonal combination of ever-changing mind and matter. In the flux is found no unchanging soul or eternal principle. The self or soul is then a piece of fiction invented by the human mind. To believe in such an absurdity is to create another source of unhappiness.

One should therefore see oneself as one truly is—a conflux of mind and matter energized by *taṇhā* or craving, containing immense possibilities for both good and evil, neither overestimating nor underestimating one's capacities and capabilities. One must also take care to recognize one's limitations and not pretend that they do not exist. It is simply a matter of accepting what one is, and deciding to make the most of oneself. With this determination, one's position in this world will be decided by one's efforts. And everyone has a place, however humble it may be, and a contribution to make as well.

Seeing that no two are alike, physically or psychologically, in the light of kamma, a wise person should, therefore, avoid comparing himself with others. Such profitless comparison can only lead to unnecessary sorrow and suffering. If he thinks that he is better than others, he may become proud and conceited and develop a superiority feeling—or an inflated "I." If the person thinks he is worse than others, he is liable to develop an inferiority feeling—or a deflated "I," and to withdraw from the realities and responsibilities of life. If he considers that he is equal to

others, there is likelihood of stagnation and disinclination to further effort and progress.

So, instead of keeping pace with, or outdoing others, socially, financially, and in other ways, the understanding layman proceeds to do something more useful. He decides to take stock of himself, to know himself, his true nature in all aspects, as a first step to improving it: the secular (such as his physical, mental, emotional qualities), the moral, and the spiritual, through careful self-examination and observation, by past performance, and by the candid comments of sincere friends. Seeing himself as a whole, he plans for life as a whole in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. Such a plan when drawn up will include all important events of a normal layman's life including occupation, marriage, and old age. Lay happiness and security lies then in finding out exactly what one *can* do and in actually doing it.

A plan like this brings order into an otherwise aimless and meaningless life, prevents drift and indicates the right direction and drive. A thoughtful lay Buddhist will not simply do what others do. He can resist the pull of the crowd when necessary. He is ever mindful both of ends pursued and the means employed. He does not merely go through life aimlessly; he goes, knowing clearly where he wants to go, with a purpose and a plan based on reality.

To be born as a human being is hard, but made easier in a Buddha Era—that is, an age when his teachings are still

remembered and practiced. The more reason then why a lay Buddhist should consciously direct his life for purposeful living with a right end, by right endeavour, to a right plan; this is the quintessence of Buddha's teachings.

(b) Earning a Living

Men work to satisfy the primary or basic urges of hunger, thirst, and sex, as well a host of secondary wants and desires created by a commercial civilization such as ours.

The Buddha's teaching is a teaching of diligence and right effort or exertion. The opposite of diligence is negligence—aimless drift, sloth, and laziness which are hindrances to both material and moral progress. It is the active man who lives purposefully, who blesses the world with wealth and wisdom. So work is essential for happy living. Life without work would be an eternal holiday, which is the hell of boredom.

A large part of our waking life is spent earning a living. So it is easy to appreciate why we should be at least moderately happy in our job. But choosing a suitable career, like choosing a marriage partner, is one of the most important yet one of the most difficult tasks in life.

The economic aspect of a community profoundly affects its other aspects. The Buddha says that society, as with all conditioned phenomena, has no finality of form and therefore changes with the passage of time. The mainsprings of social change are ideology and economics—

for men are driven to action by beliefs and desires. Some systems emphasize the latter; the Buddha, the former, for an economic structure can only influence but never determine man's thought.

Man must live and the means of his livelihood are matters of his greatest concern. A hungry man is an angry man. And a man poisoned by discontent is hardly in a fit frame of mind to develop his moral and spiritual life. The spirit may be willing but the flesh may prove to be weak. Unemployment and economic insecurity lead to tension, irritability, and loss of self-respect without which a healthy mental life is impossible. And one of the essential needs of a man is to feel he is wanted in the world.

Of human rights the right of work should, therefore, be assured to all, as a pre-requisite for the good life. It is the duty of the state to uphold justice, and provide for the material and spiritual welfare of its subjects.

While Buddhism recognizes that bread is essential for existence, it also stresses that man does not live by bread alone. This is not all. How he earns and why he does it are equally relevant. He should not gain a living by methods detrimental to the welfare of living beings—*anākulā ca kammantā*, "a peaceful occupation," as the Discourse on Blessings (Mahāmaṅgala Sutta) has it. So the Buddha forbade five kinds of trade to a lay Buddhist, and refraining from them constitutes Right Livelihood, the seventh step of the Path. They are: trading in arms, human beings, flesh

(including the breeding of animals for slaughter), intoxicants and harmful drugs, and poisons. These trades add to the already existing suffering in the world.

Economic activity should also be regarded as a means to an end—the end being the full development of man himself. Work should serve men, not enslave him. He should not be so preoccupied with the business (or, busy-ness, to be more accurate) of earning a living that he has no time to live. While income and wealth through righteous means will bring satisfaction and lay happiness, the mere accumulation of riches for their own sake will only lead to unbridled acquisitiveness and self-indulgence, resulting later in physical and mental suffering. The enjoyment of wealth implies not merely its use for one's own happiness, but also the giving for the welfare of others as well.

The Buddha further says that the progress, prosperity, and happiness of a lay person depends on hard and steady effort —rather discouraging, no doubt, to many people who want something for nothing. Efficiency in work, be it high or humble, makes a useful contribution to the production of socially desirable goods and services. It gives one's work meaning and interest, besides enabling one to support oneself and one's family in comfort. Conservation and improvement of one's resources and talents, acquired or inherited, with balanced living, living within one's income, ensuring freedom from debt is a sure indicator of right seeing or understanding. Lastly, a blameless moral and spiritual life should be the aim of right livelihood.

Life is one and indivisible, and the working life is a part of the whole. The man who is unhappy at work is unhappy at home, too. Unhappiness spreads. Likewise, business life is part of life. The Dhamma of the Blessed One should therefore pervade and permeate one's entire life for only wealth rooted in righteous endeavour can yield true happiness.

(c) Bringing up a Family

In the Mahā-maṅgala Sutta the Buddha teaches us that:

> Mother and father well supporting,
> Wife and children duly cherishing
> Types of work unconflicting,
> This, the Highest Blessing.
>
> —Sn 2.4

The essentials of happy family life are then a partnership of two parents with common aims, attitudes, and ideals who love, respect, and trust each other; who love and understand their children, on whom they, in turn, can depend for the same treatment and sound guidance grounded on true values, living by Right Livelihood, and supporting aged parents. In Buddhism, however, marriage is not a compulsory institution for all lay followers. It is optional. This brings us to the important question of sex.

The sex instinct is a powerful impersonal impulse or force in us all to ensure the preservation of the race. Nature, to make

sure of its objective, made the reproductive act of sexual union highly pleasurable so that it is inevitably sought by the individual for its own sake. There is no special mating season for humans, and males and females may find that they are physically attracted at any time.

Sex is an essential part of life. In some form or other it affects us every day, and often ends in choosing a partner for life. It can make or mar a householder's life.

What is the Buddhist attitude to sex? For a lay person, there is nothing sinful or shameful in sex, nor does it carry lifelong burdens of guilt. Sexual desire, in its personal aspect, is just like another form of craving and, as craving, leads to suffering. Sexual desire, too, must be controlled and finally totally eradicated. This happiness [4] arises only at the third stage of Sainthood, that of Anāgāmi. When a lay Buddhist becomes an Anāgāmi, he leads a celibate life.

But sexual behaviour, in its social context, demands mindfulness of the fact that at least one other person's happiness is at stake and, possibly, that of another—a potential child. And children born of premarital relations, when deprived and unwanted, often develop into juvenile delinquents. Besides, pre-marital sex may carry with it the risks of venereal infection. A compassionate Buddhist, mindful of his own and others' welfare, acts wisely and responsibly in sexual matters. Misconduct for a layman means sexual union with the wives of others or those under protection of father, mother, sister, brother, or guardian,

including one's employees.

Adolescence is a period of stress and strain. It is at this time that the sex instinct becomes active, and sensible parents should guide and help their children to adjust to the changes. This sexual energy could be diverted not merely to outdoor games and sports, but also to creative activities like hand work, gardening, and other constructive activities.

It is not easy for an unmarried adult to practice sexual self-restraint till such time as he is able to marry. No doubt he lives in a sex-drenched commercial civilization where sex is seen, heard, sensed, and thought of most the time. But the ideal of sex only within marriage is something worth aiming at. The Buddhist's ultimate objective is, after all, to be a Perfect Man—not a perfect beast. And a start has to be made some day, somewhere—and now is the best time for it.

At all times in a man's life, it is mind that dominates man's actions. It is mind that makes one what one is. There is no doubt about this. Truly, it is an encouraging fact—one tends to become what one wants to be. And, if one wishes to be chaste, one can be. One's life will then move irresistibly in the direction of its fulfilment.

Much can be done by sublimating the instinct by diverting the energy in the sex impulse into other activities. Developing an occupational interest or hobbies or sports can divert the mind and provide suitable outlets. Moderation in eating is helpful. But what is most important is the guarding of thoughts regarding all sexual matters. One must also

avoid situations and stimuli likely to excite sexual desires. [5] When sensual desires do arise, the following methods may be tried:

1. Mindfully note the presence of such thoughts without delay; when they tend to arise, merely notice them without allowing yourself to be carried away by these thoughts.
2. Simply neglect such thoughts, turning your mind either to beneficial thoughts or to an activity that absorbs you.
3. Reflect on the possible end results.

Steps should also be taken to foster and maintain all that is wholesome, as for instance, wise friendship, and keeping oneself usefully occupied at all times. If one has succeeded in meditative practice, the happiness derived from it will be a powerful counter-force against sexual desires.

This mindfulness is the only way to achieve self-mastery. It is a hard fight requiring patient and persistent practice; nevertheless, it is a fight worth waging and a goal worth winning.

(d) Social Relationships

A lay Buddhist lives in society. He must adjust himself to other people to get on smoothly with them. Human relationships—the education of the emotions—are the fourth R in education and play an important part in everyday life. So instead of keeping pace with, or outdoing others socially, financially, and in other ways, the

understanding layman proceeds to do something more useful. Happiness and security then lie in finding out exactly what one can do, and doing it well.

The lay person who practices morality (*sīla*) by reason of his virtue, gives peace of mind to those around him. He controls his deeds and words by following the third, fourth, and fifth steps of the noble Eightfold Path, namely Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood or by observing the Five Precepts (*Pañca sīla*).

Such regulated behaviour flows from proper understanding of the Buddhist doctrine of kamma, that a man is what he is because of action and the result of action. If one is genuinely trying to tread the path, one's daily life should reflect it. So, the Buddhist avoids killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, drugs, intoxicants, and harmful lying, tale-bearing, harsh words, and idle talk.

The Buddha's attitude toward stupefying drugs and intoxicants is clear and simple: complete abstinence from both. And why? The immediate aim of a Buddhist layman is happiness and security, here and now—in the present existence, while his distant objective is the lasting peace and security of Nibbāna and, therewith, freedom from repeated births and deaths, with their attendant frustrations, disappointments, and the pain of temporal life. Now, the one and only tool he has at his disposal to achieve both of these goals is the weapon of the mind, which, under the wise guidance of the Master's teaching, he gradually learns

to use with skill, without ill to himself or others. And one of the best ways of impairing the efficiency of this precious mental instrument—to make it dull and blunt, is to partake of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Even when taken in moderation they have a pernicious influence on the mind and on the body, as well as on the character and the moral qualities. Under their baneful effects, mind becomes confused, and the drinker finds it difficult to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, the true and false. Such a person, then, wrongs himself, wrongs those who live with him, and wrongs society at large. On the other hand, he who faithfully follows the Buddha's advice and abstains completely from the use of all intoxicants and harmful drugs, is always sober in mind, and is therefore able to exercise physical, mental, and moral control. Such a one has always a clear mind and can easily understand what is going on within, and also without, one's mind.

But what of a Buddhist who, as a rule, refrains from alcoholic drinks and drugs, but occasionally finds himself placed in a delicate situation such as when offered an intoxicating drink at a party given by his superior or at an important occasion? Should he accept or refuse? At least two possible courses are open to him: he could politely decline excusing himself on medical grounds (which are justifiable), and ask instead for a non-alcoholic drink, mindfully noting what is taking place, and impress on his mind that even a single deviation from the ideal of total abstinence is to open the way, even temporarily, to

heedlessness, recklessness, and mental confusion. Alcohol does impair the ability to think clearly, to decide wisely, and to perform any work of an exacting nature. If a Buddhist layman, while aiming at absolute perfection occasionally lapses, and is content with approximations, he is free to do so—but at his own grave peril.

Positively, the Buddhist layman is kind and compassionate to all, honest and upright, pure and chaste, sober and heedful in mind. He speaks only that which is true, in accordance with facts, sweet, peaceable, and helpful. Morality is a fence that protects us from the poisons of the outer world. It is, therefore, a pre-requisite for higher spiritual aspirations and through it character shines. The development of personality on such lines results in charm, tact, and tolerance—essential qualities to adjust oneself to society, and to get on well with other people.

In the Sigālovāda Sutta, the Buddha explained to young Sigāla the reciprocal relationship that should exist among the members of society. They are worth mentioning in brief; parents have to look after their children, and guide and educate them; children have to respect their parents, perform their duties and maintain family traditions; teachers must train and instruct pupils in the proper way; and pupils in turn must be diligent and dutiful; a husband should be kind, loyal, and respectful of his wife, supply her needs and give her due place in the home, and she in return should be faithful, understanding, efficient, industrious, and economical in the performance of her duties; friends should

be generous, sincere, kindly, and helpful to one another, and a sheltering tree in time of need; employers must be considerate to their employees, give adequate wages, ensure satisfactory conditions of work and service and they, in return must work honestly, efficiently and be loyal to their masters; the laity should support and sustain the monks and other holy men who, in turn, should discourage them to do evil, encourage them to do good, expound the teaching and show the way to happiness.

Buddhist morality is grounded on both thought and feeling. A Buddhist monk does social service when he himself, while not engaging in the worldly life, so teaches the Dhamma that he makes the lay followers better Buddhists, and thereby induces them to take to social work, which is an ideal practical form of the Four Sublime States, Loving Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and Equanimity, besides their practice of these at the meditational levels. They should be the four cornerstones of genuine lay Buddhist life. The Four Sublime States form the foundation of individual and social peace, and combine in them the realism of human nature and the idealism of youth to work for the social betterment, out of natural sympathy and concern for fellow-beings.

But social work to be of real value should spring from genuine love, sympathy, and understanding for fellow-men, guided by knowledge and training. It is the living expression of Buddhist brotherhood.

The cultivation of the neglect of these duties is a matter for each one of us, but their promotion will undoubtedly foster healthier inter-personal relationships, decrease social tension and irritability, and appreciably increase social good, stability, and harmony.

Mental Health

Life is full of stress and strain, but we have to live in conditions as they are and make the best of them. Successful adjustment to life in the light of Buddha's teachings will, however, ensure the all-round progress of the lay Buddhist, maximizing happiness and minimizing pain.

The Buddha names four kinds of lay happiness: the happiness of possession as health, wealth, longevity, wife, and children; the enjoyment of such possessions; freedom from debt; and a blameless moral and spiritual life. Yet even the happiest person cannot say when and in what form misfortune may strike him. Against suffering, the externals of life will be of little or no avail. Real happiness and security are then to be sought in one's own mind, to be built up by constant effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

So the wise layman while being *in* this world, will try to be less and less *of* it. He will train his mind to look at life mindfully with detachment, and soon discover that modern civilization is, by and large, a commercial one, for the benefit of a powerful minority at the expense of the unthinking majority, based on the intensification and

multiplication of artificial wants, often by arousing and stimulating the undesirable and lower elements of human nature, and that the increasing satisfaction of these wants leads not to peace and stillness of mind, but only to chronic discontent, restlessness, dissatisfaction, and conflict.

He therefore decides to practice voluntary simplicity and finds a new freedom; the less he wants, the happier and freer he is.

Thinking man realizes that there are but four essential needs for the body—pure food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. Corresponding to these, there are four for the mind—right knowledge, virtue, constant guarding of the sense doors, and meditation.

Bhāvanā, or meditation, is the systematic training and culture of the mind with Nibbāna as its goal. The emotions are controlled, the will is disciplined, and the instinctive energies are diverted from their natural ends—led along the Four Great Efforts (the sixth step of the path)—to the sublimated ideal of a perfect Man (the Arahant) or Nibbāna. If there is an urgent felt need, the ideal has the power of drawing out all one's instinctive impulses so that they are sublimated and harmonized, giving satisfaction to the individual, and therefore benefiting the community as well.

Closely connected with our instincts are the emotions. By emotion is meant a feeling which moves us strongly. We get stirred up, as it were. Examples of emotion are fear, anger, and strong sexual passion. When emotion floods the mind,

reason retreats or disappears, and we often do things for which we repent later. So some emotional control is necessary, for, without it, character cannot be developed, and moral and spiritual progress is impossible.

Fear is a common emotion that darkens our lives. It is anticipation of deprivations. One tries to live in two periods of time at once—the present and the future. To know how fear arises enables us to take the right steps for its removal. It results from wrong seeing, not understanding things as they really are. Uncertainty and change are the keynotes of life. To each one of us there is only one thing that is truly "ours," is "us": our character, as shown by our actions. As for the rest, nothing belongs to us. We can visualize everything else being taken away, save this. But this, one's character, nobody and nothing else can deprive one of. Why then go to pieces when all other things that are liable to break, do break? Why fret about the fragility of the frail? Besides, are we so careful of not taking other people's things, as we are of preserving ours? Our past actions of depriving others may only end in others now depriving us. It is only fair and just.

This attitude of detachment to life's storms is the only sound philosophy that can bring one a true security and a true serenity.

Or again, there is no such thing as justifiable anger in Buddhism, for if one is in the right, one should not be angry, and if one is in the wrong, one cannot afford to be angry.

Therefore, under any circumstances one should not become angry.

A good way to secure emotional control is to practice noticing mindfully and promptly an incipient hindrance (or any other mental state of mind); then, of its own, it tends to fade away. If done as often as possible, it will be very effective. The five hindrances are undue attachment to sensual desire; ill-will; laziness and inertia; agitation and worry; and doubt. The last here refers to indecision or unsteadiness in the particular thing that is being done. One must know exactly one's own mind—not be a Hamlet, unable to decide, because one is always mistrusting one's own judgment.

Daily practice is the way to progress. Even a little practice every day, brings a person a little nearer to his object, day by day.

Right Livelihood:The Noble Eightfold Path in the Working Life

by Susan Elbaum Jootla

The question of correct livelihood is of great importance for any practicing lay Buddhist. So also to the many meditators once they have done enough meditation courses, and work on their own, to realize that they must live a Dhamma life. Just what is Right Livelihood—how broad is the category of trades a disciple of the Buddha cannot ply? And how can one best work so that he is developing the other seven Path factors while earning a living? Is work a total waste—just a means to the end of supporting oneself in order to meditate? Or can one's job be used in a more constructive way so that it brings some direct benefit to those around us as well? These and many other related issues come to the mind of anyone who finds himself in the position of the Buddha's teachings, and to a large extent each of us has to determine for himself the details of how to work out the livelihood aspects of his life. In this essay an attempt is made simply to outline how we can try to use the Noble Eightfold Path in

relation to our work—whether it is in an office or a factory, in the city or country, whether it is indoors or outdoors, white collar or blue collar or neither. If the meditator succeeds in applying *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom), the three aspects of the Path, at work as well as in all other life situations, he will be growing in Dhamma even during the part of the day that is apparently devoted to non-Dhamma work, and at the same time he will be doing his job well and sharing his peace of mind and *mettā* (loving-kindness) with those his livelihood brings him into contact with.

> Monks, these five trades ought not to be plied by a lay-disciple… Trade in weapons, trade in human beings, trade in flesh, trade in spirits [intoxicants] and trade in poison.
>
> *Gradual Sayings* III, p. 153. (AN 5.177)

> And what, monks, is wrong mode of livelihood? Trickery, cajolery, insinuating, dissembling, rapacity for gain upon gain… And what, monks, is the right side of merit that ripens unto cleaving to a new birth? Herein monks, an ariyan disciple, by getting rid of wrong livelihood, earns his living by a right mode of living…
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> *Middle Length Sayings* III, pp. 118–19.

The fields of livelihood which the Buddha prohibited to his

lay followers, as listed in the initial quotation above, are limited to those in which the disciple would be directly, on his own responsibility, involved in breaking one or more of the Five Precepts, which are the very basic moral rules for the Buddhist layman. Anyone who is attempting to develop morality, concentration, and wisdom, to grow in compassion and insight, cannot deal in weapons of any sort, at any level of the business because by doing so he would be involving himself in causing harm or injury to others for his own monetary gain. These days the probability of trading in human beings as slaves or for prostitution is limited, but certainly any job with such overtones is to be avoided. Breeding animals for slaughter as meat or for other uses that may be made of the carcasses is not allowed because this obviously implies breaking the First Precept: I shall abstain from killing. Working on someone else's beef ranch or selling packaged meat is acceptable as there is no responsibility for killing involved. Similarly, anyone trying to follow the teachings of the Buddha should avoid hunting and fishing, nor can he be an exterminator of animals. Dealing in alcohol or intoxicating drugs would be making oneself directly responsible for encouraging others to break the Fifth Precept: I shall abstain from all intoxicants. While by no means everyone we meet is trying to keep these precepts, still, to help others directly in breaking any of them is certainly wrong livelihood. If we manufacture, deal in, or use insecticides or other kinds of poisons in our work, we are engaging to some degree in wrong livelihood

because here, too, we are breaking the First Precept and directly encouraging others to do so as well. However, the motivation behind the use of such material has a great deal to do with the depth of the kamma being created. A doctor rightly gives drugs which are harmful to bacteria and viruses, not because he hates the "bugs," but in order to help cure the human being. Here the good more than balances the bad. But if we go about applying poison to rat-holes and cockroaches' hideouts with anger or aversion toward the pests, we would be generating considerably strong bad kamma.

But these five are the only ways of earning a living which are to be strictly avoided by one who is walking on the Path. Other fields of endeavour may seem trivial to the meditator investigating the job market, or they may appear to be just helping others to create more *taṇhā* (craving), or they may involve some indirect responsibility in wrong speech or action—but we must find our work within the context of the society from which we come, and within the framework of available job opportunities. It is not possible first to go about setting up the ideal Dhamma community and then find work within it; so we must live in the society and serve its members to the best of our ability. Someone who finds Dhamma in middle age and is settled into a career with little reasonable possibility of shifting to one more strictly in accord with Right Livelihood can—and must—practice Dhamma as it is possible within his context. For example, only rarely does an army officer serve in combat—the rest of

the time there is ample scope for him to work wisely, according to *paññña*, in a detached way, giving the necessary commands without being overly harsh. There are a substantial number of police officers in Rajasthan doing vipassanā meditation who already are feeling the benefits of meditation in preserving law and order and dealing with criminals and the general public with little anger. Even people whose livelihood is solely dependent on hunting or fishing can at least develop *dāna* (liberality) and other virtues—as Burmese fishermen do—even if it is impossible for them to give up an incorrect mode of earning a living. After all, an important reason for which serious Buddhists become monks is that "the householder's life is full of dust," and few positions for lay livelihood can allow one to be completely pure. Due to the interdependence of all phases of society and today's complex economic structures, it is very difficult to live as a layman and keep the perfect *sīla* the meditator strives for—a farmer has to use insecticides, public health workers kill mosquitoes and their larvae, a truck driver may sometimes have to transport arms or poison. Often one is in a position of having to exaggerate one's statements or omit disadvantageous facts, even if one does not like it. So we must earn our livelihood as we have been trained, and as we find a position for ourselves in society while constantly making an effort to grow in Dhamma.

However, if we let the Dhamma slide and allow our daily routine work to take over and become the thing of

paramount importance, then we have lost track of the goal we set for ourselves in being dedicated followers of the Buddha, and especially serious vipassanā meditators. One cannot use Dhamma for one's increased mundane profit and continue to grow in *paññā* (wisdom) at the same time because then desire for gain (which is *taṇhā*) will be the root of one's very Dhamma practice and a complete distortion of the real purpose of Dhamma—the elimination of craving (*taṇhā*) and so of suffering (*dukkha*). Occupational work is a means to keep alive and to support one's dependents so that one can grow in Dhamma. Trying to use the Dhamma to help one achieve more at work, and ignoring the Noble Eightfold Path, or getting so involved in business that one cannot even sit for meditation an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening is making a farce of Dhamma—perhaps keeping the form but surely losing the essence of the Buddha's teaching. This is the way of *dukkha*, productive of suffering. To alleviate *dukkha* one must live by the Eightfold Path, earning one's livelihood within its context, trying to practice *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*—morality, concentration, and wisdom—at the workplace as well as while formally sitting in meditation.

Once we have found a suitable job, the more long range task begins—applying the Buddha's teachings at work. If we can keep *sīla* only during meditation courses what serious benefit have we gained from such training periods? If we lose all our mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom when we are confronted with the vibrations of a big city or the

workplace, where is our wisdom? To grow in Dhamma we have to try constantly to apply the whole of the Noble Eightfold Path in all life's circumstances, and some of the more challenging situations we will come across are very likely to be those we meet during working hours. Jobs are particularly important occasions to keep carefully to the Path for a number of reasons: (1) usually we do not have the support of the Sangha while at work and so are completely on our own; (2) work tends to arouse all previous thought associations and our deep-seated conditionings of greed, competition, and aversion; (3) so many of our waking hours are inevitably involved in simply earning a living. Yet if we rightly apply the Path factors on the job, we are still assured of moving toward success in the supramundane field, and we are quite apt to find that these factors enable us to do well in our chosen mundane work as well.

Let us first examine the relationship at work between the three *sīla* factors of Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. Right Livelihood was outlined in the first quotation from the Buddha. But Right Livelihood will not be really pure unless it includes Right Speech and Right Action as well. We have to strive with determination to keep all the Five Precepts while we work at a job, as well as for the rest of the time. The forms of wrong speech and wrong action to be avoided are all those in which lying, backbiting, or harming of others would be involved. If we are honest in our speech and actions, our employers will certainly be pleased with our work and we will be growing

in Dhamma by confronting our mind's opposing tendencies; we will note when the mind tries to find the easy way out or to blame others for our own errors. If we are running our own business, we must be scrupulously honest in our dealings with our customers and avoid all "trickery, cajolery… dissembling." We can make a reasonable profit for services we perform of bringing our commodity to the consumer, but we must not let ourselves get caught up in the businessman's perpetual tendency toward "rapacity for gain upon gain." The merchant plays an important role and function in the community, but the meditator-businessman must always keep in mind that his job is to serve the society and provide for the needs of his family—not to make the maximum amount of money with the least effort as he might previously have perceived it.

Whatever our work situation is—in an office, factory, or shop—we will always feel the benefits of keeping *sīla*. If we do not indulge in gossip or slander—"office or academic politics"—but keep clearly to the side of right and honesty in every situation that arises with other workers or our employers, we will find that we are less often at the receiving end of other people's anger. In fact, if we are really able to keep on the Path at work, we may well find ourselves in the position of peacemaker or mediator between the opposing sides in many a workplace dispute—and in such a role we will certainly be serving others.

To practice Right Action at work we must scrupulously avoid anything even remotely related to stealing for our

own personal gain. The less we are involved in anyone else's taking what was not intended for him, the better off we are as well. So it is beneficial to all to dissuade other workers from stealing from the establishment, "liberating" materials, or otherwise misappropriating the employer's property. On the other hand, the kammic implications for us in occasionally having to exaggerate a bit at the boss's behest, or to do the firm's accounts in a legally dubious way they have always been done, once in a while, are not so severe because the full responsibility for such occasional acts is not with us. However, we do bear some responsibility in these situations and if the job seems to require chronic dishonesty in speech or action, and this situation cannot be altered by discussion with the employer, then it may be necessary to change jobs. But we have to keep a balanced perspective and not keep running after the perfect work—part of the *dukkha* of the householder's life is the necessity to function in an immoral society while keeping one's own mind clear.

So if we have chosen work which does not involve us in killing, or trading in living beings, or poisons, or in dealing in intoxicants, we are earning a Right Livelihood. And if, while on the job we carefully avoid lying, stealing, and the associated forms of wrong speech and action, we are doing our work and simultaneously practicing *sīla* on the Path.

The *samadi* section of the Path during meditation has effects in the mundane world, for Right Effort, Mindfulness, and Concentration will contribute greatly to our success in our

career.

Right Effort at work, as elsewhere, must be neither over-exertion nor laziness, but a Middle Path. For a businessman to spend all his waking hours involved in the concerns of his firm means that he is consumed with some strong *taṇhā* either for making money or for some particular set of circumstances to come about, and this is in direct contradiction with living the Dhamma life. On the other hand, the employee who sees how inane his work is, or how absurd it is to put two pieces into a car on an assembly line for eight hours a day, or that his job just helps people keep revolving in *dukkha*, and so sits back and does only the barest minimum required of him, means to be overcome by defilement of sloth and torpor, and probably ill-will as well. Right Effort at work means doing our best to accomplish the tasks before us—without becoming mindlessly absorbed or involved in them to the point of forgetting equanimity, and without the inertia that comes of a belligerent mind which thinks itself to be superior to the position it is in. Unrelenting effort in the mundane sphere is summarized by the Buddha in a discourse on the householder's life to the lay disciple Dīghajanu (quoted in "Meditation and the Householder" by Ven. Acharya Buddharakkhita, in *Mahā Bodhi,* January 1976):

> "By whatsoever activity a householder earns his living, whether by farming, by trading, by rearing cattle, by archery, by service under the king, or by any other kind of craft, at that he becomes skilful are

> tireless. He is endowed with the power of discernment as to the proper ways and means; he is able to arrange and carry out duties. This is called the accomplishment of unrelenting effort."

Samma sati, Right Mindfulness or Awareness, is the next factor of the *samādhi* section of the Path, and there are several ways in which the mindfulness we gain from vipassanā will help us on the job.

> "Herein, Dīghajanu, whatsoever wealth a householder is in possession of, obtained by work and zeal, collected by the strength of this arm, by the sweat of his brow, justly acquired by right means, such he husbands well by guarding and watching so that kings may not seize it, thieves may not steal it, nor fire burn it, nor water carry it off, nor ill-disposed heirs remove. This is the accomplishment of watchfulness."

The quality of mindfulness mentioned by the Buddha here is not the same as the sammā-*sati* of the Noble Eightfold Path, but this watchfulness is a by-product of mindfulness important to the lay-follower. The more the meditator has developed awareness in the supramundane field, the more careful he will be in all situations of life—meditative, household, or work. If one's mindfulness is not "Right," however, then one will be apt to take this injunction of the Buddha's as license to indulge in great *upādāna*, that is, in

clinging, by all possible means, to what one regards as one's own. This kind of ignorance-based watchfulness will only lead to *dukkha*. What we have to learn to do is care for the possessions we have acquired so that we and our dependents can make best use of them, but without making the error of expecting them to last indefinitely, nor of considering them as a personal possession fully in one's own control. To want only to give away one's hard-earned or inherited goods to anyone who expresses a desire for them is folly. *Dana* or charity can earn us great merit, but only when done in wisdom and when the quality of the recipient also helps to determine how much merit is earned. Material possessions in themselves are not the fetters that keep us in *dukkha*, so having fewer things or more, for that matter, will not necessarily bring more happiness; it is our attachment to them that is the bondage that must be eliminated. So if we apply Right Mindfulness to the proper taking care of our things, we are only intelligently providing for our own welfare and for that of those who are dependent on us, not necessarily generating more *taṇhā* (craving).

Increased awareness or mindfulness is intertwined with improved concentration in enhancing our performance at work. Greater awareness of all the parameters of a situation will enable a businessman to make more accurate decisions, a workman to avoid accidents, and a teacher to really communicate information to his students.

In addition to this mindfulness of external situations, we

also have to try to be mindful of our own minds and bodies while we work, as well as the rest of the time, of course. Once we become fairly established in the tradition of *vedanānupassanā* (mindfulness of feelings, as taught in the tradition of Sayaji U Ba Khin), we have acquired a ready technique for keeping mindfulness always with us. Continual change is always going on in our bodies, so at no time can it be said that there are no sensations, since it is the impermanent (*anicca*) nature of the body which causes the sensations. Once we have acquired the skill of feeling these sensations while we are engaged in daily activities, we would do well to keep some degree of awareness of the *anicca* feelings, or of *ānāpāna* (mindfulness of breathing) awake all the time. Then no matter how difficult, or how boring, or how exhausting be the tasks that we are faced with, we will find that we have a relatively equanimous and balanced mind with which to face them, because we will be alternating mind-moments of mindfulness and wisdom, relating to the ultimate nature of our mind-and-body (*nāma-rūpa*), with the mind-moments that are of necessity fully engaged in the mundane work at hand. Meditators engaged in contemplating the feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), who have practiced the technique for some time, find that this mindfulness of the sensations which are caused by the continual flux that is the nature of the body keeps them in a balanced and detached frame of mind in all kinds of trying situations—and certainly work experiences can sometimes be difficult enough to make it well worth our while to

develop the skill of keeping the mindfulness of *anicca* (impermanence) always with us.

Concentration, the last of the *samādhi* section of the Path, obviously is vital to anyone in any task he attempts. The meditator will find that vipassanā has enhanced his one-pointedness and this skill will be applied in all the spheres of life, including work. But he must be sure that even at work this concentration is not rooted in strong craving or ill-will, otherwise the meditator may fall into the trap of squandering pure Dhamma for material gain, by using the enhanced concentration without the other aspects of the Path, *sīla* and *paññā*, to balance it. Naturally, it is always useful to keep one's mind clearly focused on the job at hand —if the mind is constantly running off in various directions toward irrelevant objects, our work will be slowed down and perhaps inadequately completed. As the mind is trained in vipassanā meditation to be detached from, not distracted by, the pleasure and pains of the senses, we will find that when we are working we will have less and less difficulty concentrating on what has to be done at this time and tend to worry less about the past or future. This does not mean that we do not plan our purchases or work schedule or ignore the future implications of decisions taken now. We do all these kinds of activities; we make all needed choices and decisions, but once such action has been taken, the mind settles back down into the job of the present without being hampered and held back by worries about the past or fears of the future.

An artist or mechanic or craftsman is much better at his creating if his concentration is clear and his mind stays firmly with the materials at hand. A doctor's or lawyer's understanding of his client's situation will be correspondingly increased as his concentration on what the client describes is improved—he cannot practice his profession at all without a fair amount of concentration. Certainly all kinds of teaching and learning depend on one-pointedness of mind. A merchant or farmer or businessman will be much better equipped to solve the difficulties of his work if he can carefully concentrate on all aspects of the problems at hand, distinguish relevant from tangential issues, and sort out appropriate solutions. Concentration is one of the mental factors that is present in any mind-moment, but the degree to which it is developed varies considerably between individuals. A vipassanā meditator generally has a well-developed faculty of concentration due to his mental training and if he puts this ability to appropriate use in the workplace, he will in this way gain mundane benefits from his meditation.

The remaining sections of the Noble Eightfold Path fall into the category of wisdom. *Sammā-diṭṭhi*, Right Understanding or Right View, means the ability to see things as they are in their true nature by penetrating through the apparent truth. This means understanding the *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* nature of all phenomena, mental and physical, that is their impermanency, unsatisfactoriness, and egolessness. This understanding should be applied to everyday life—

including our work.

Right Understanding (*samma diṭṭhi*) also requires a basic understanding of the Four Noble Truths—of Suffering, its Cause, its Cessation; further, of the Law of Kamma or moral cause and effect, and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination. By means of Right Thought, *sammā-saṅkappa*, the remaining Path-and-Wisdom-factor, one considers all that happens in life with a mind that is free of greed and of hatred. For this discussion of the Noble Eightfold Path in the work situation it is not necessary to separate Right Thought from Right Understanding, as without one the other could not exist in such situations.

To apply wisdom (*paññā*) at work means always trying to keep the mind equanimous and detached while it is engaged in the necessary mundane activities and interaction with other people. So if the boss gets annoyed and shouts at us, we remind ourselves that he is at that moment suffering and generating more suffering for himself. We try to do the right thing if he is pointing out a reasonable fault, and in any case we attempt to send him *mettā* and not let anger arise in reaction to his sparks.

Whenever a businessman or professor or other professional gets so involved in his work that it occupies his mind all the time, keeping it scheming up more plans or "solving problems" without rest or even time for meditation, he is acting on the basis of ignorance, not of wisdom. He has forgotten that all the phenomena he is dealing with are

primarily operating according to laws of cause and effect, and that his own will and decisions can only do one part of any job; the remainder is beyond his control.

One is not seeing *anattā*, the egoless nature of external phenomena if he develops tremendous craving (*taṇhā*) for the results of his work. *Anicca*, change and decay, is inherent in all phenomena, but we often slip into ignorance of this factor and unreasonably try to prolong favourable business conditions or consider our resources infinite or get attached to any particular situation. If we forget the Four Noble Truths at work, especially the First and Second—*dukkha* and *taṇhā* as the cause of *dukkha*—we will be continuing to generate more and more unhappiness for ourselves as our craving grows in intensity. Job situations, especially since they involve money, are very likely to bring up the strong conditioning for craving we all have from the past, and if this desire is not observed with wisdom, we will be continually digging deeper mental ruts that will inevitably lead to future misery. To avoid this we have to train our minds to see how no situation, however apparently "pleasant" it may seem to be, is actually desirable because: (1) no situation can last, all are *anicca*; (2) the state of craving is itself one of unhappiness; and (3) all craving must lead in the direction of future *dukkha*. And, of course, the opposite situation in which the mind reacts with aversion to the circumstances, be they work-related or otherwise, is precisely the same—both clinging and aversion are *taṇhā*.

If the market for our product is favourable at present, if our

superiors are pleased with our work, if we are getting good grades at the university, or if any other pleasant situation arises in the course of our work, we would do well to recall that this situation, too, is unsatisfactory. Pleasant experiences bring *dukkha* because they cannot last forever, and any mind which still has conditioning of *taṇhā* and *avijjā* (ignorance), will try to cling to what it likes, striving to perpetuate the pleasant feelings. If we keep the First and Second Noble Truths in mind when we encounter both happy and unhappy states on the job, our minds will be able to remain detached and calm and perfectly equanimous —the only kind of happiness that can endure—no matter what vicissitudes we have to face. At any moment we may run into material gain or loss, be famous or infamous, receive praise or blame, experience happiness or pain. But if the mind remains free from clinging, if it has seen *dukkha* in all craving, then none of this can really touch us and we are sure of inner peace, no matter what the outer circumstances may be.

Recalling the law of cause and effect, cultivating this aspect of *paññā* at work, is quite important and useful. To create good kamma the mind has to try to remain free of clinging and aversion, so we have to keep a close watch on our reactions if we are not to prolong the misery of *saṃsāra*. We should not, however, expect that just because we have thought of this and are trying to keep ourselves away from *taṇhā* that this freedom will easily come about—this would be forgetting the *anattā* egolessness nature of the mind. Only

gradually can we recondition the mind to operate in channels based on wisdom, by reminding ourselves whenever we notice an unwholesome reaction that such actions lead only to *dukkha*, and that nothing at all is worth getting attached to or developing aversion toward. In this way, over a long period of time we will notice how the force of our reactions does diminish. So when our superior yells at us and we in turn get angry, we just note the reaction and the sensations that arise, see their foolishness and as soon as we can, just let go of them. If a business deal is pending, and we are getting more and more tense about it as the days go by, we may not be able to just give up the tension, but if we observe how this particular conditioning of the mind is happening with some part of the mind detached and with the sensations (which will be reflecting the mind-reactions), we are no longer reinforcing the tension saṅkhāras and so the next time they arise, they will be weaker. Becoming impatient with the unwholesome tendencies of the mind cannot change them and, in fact, this would be generating more unwholesome tendencies of a slightly different sort. If the aversion to work keeps coming up, never mind; just observe that, too, with the *anicca* sensations, and slowly it will decrease in frequency and intensity.

Paññā can and must be applied in all situations. It may not be as powerfully clear as when we are meditating, but if we neglect it during the part of the day while at work, we are not living by the totality of the Path; and without trying to understand all the situations of life in their ultimate nature,

we cannot expect to progress toward the goal of liberation from all suffering.

When we have undertaken the task of removing all the causes of suffering—which is what it means to be a serious vipassanā meditator—we have committed ourselves to a full-time job. To grow in the wisdom that can remove *dukkha* one must at all times try to practice all the aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the Way taught by the Buddha that enables us to find for ourselves real and lasting peace and happiness. When we are engaged in our mundane work of earning a livelihood, we must be sure to keep our *sīla* (morality) as pure as possible. Vipassanā meditation will have increased our *samādhi* (concentration) and we must be sure that it is Right Concentration we apply on the job, along with balanced Effort. Mindfulness of the true nature of the external experiences and internal phenomena we come into contact with when working must be kept alive. And finally, *paññā*, Right Understanding, and Right Thought must be developed with respect to our relationships with our co-workers, the various conditions at the workplace, and the functioning of our minds while engaged in earning a livelihood.

As we practice the Noble Eightfold Path and live the life of a lay-disciple of the Buddha, meditating while working and living in society, we will find ourselves growing in Dhamma while simultaneously serving all those we come into contact with in some fashion or the other. And just this is the essence of the Dhamma life—to eradicate the causes of

one's own suffering by purifying the mind, and with the mind thus freed of greed, hatred, and ignorance, full of *mettā* and compassion, help others in their own quest for real happiness.

May all beings be peaceful!

Having Taken the First Step

by M.O'C. Walshe

What does it feel like when one has fairly recently embarked on a course of Buddhism? The answers will vary a great deal, no doubt, but there ought to be some general characteristics and some problems common to the majority of "newborn" Buddhists in the West. Let us assume that you are a person who has quite recently, or within the last year or so, begun to take Buddhism seriously as a personal way of life. You may by now be just looking round a bit in your new mental surroundings and trying to take stock of what has happened, now that the first novelty of the situation has worn off. You have, I sincerely hope, tried to do a bit of meditation, though it would not surprise me in the least to hear that you have found this difficult and disappointing. If so, I would like to tell you straight away that you should not be discouraged. This is quite the normal thing. Meditation may *seem* disappointing and even almost useless for quite a long time, but if you persevere in it, results are bound to come. But these results may not be at all the sort of thing you expect. And *you* may not even be the person who first

becomes aware of them. So press on regardless, and don't *look* for results. If you can see the point of this piece of advice you have already in fact made useful progress. Insights often come very subtly.

People's motives for taking up Buddhism may vary a great deal on the surface. But fundamentally you have probably come to it because, in one way or another, it seems to promise you *security*. If you haven't realized before that this was a good part of your motive, you might usefully use your next meditation period trying to find out whether I was right or not. If you have realized this, then you may agree that you find the formula "I go to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha for refuge" strangely comforting. And so it should be in one way, even though fundamentally you have to learn to be "a refuge unto yourself." This is perhaps the first of the many paradoxes you will encounter attempting to tread the Buddhist path.

Now if we consider this problem of security a little further, we soon find that we do indeed crave for it. The obvious reason is that we feel life frankly unnerving, in fact, *insecure*. Here, then, we find straight away two of the three "Marks of Existence": all things are marked by impermanence and suffering. *Because* they—and we—are impermanent, they are frustrating, and cause us all kinds of anguish. Buddhism offers a way out of this situation by treading the Noble Eightfold Path. I am assuming that, having "taken the first step," you are now familiar with the Four Noble Truths and the steps of this Path. So I just want to mention a few points

which may arise at this stage. The first step of the path is known as Right Understanding or Right View. This is seeing things as they are. There are large areas of experience which we would much rather know nothing about. This is the origin of repression, to use a Freudian term which is misleadingly translated. The German for "repression" in the psychoanalytical sense is *Verdrangung*, "thrusting away." It is really successful self-deception. Getting rid of our repressions is therefore not doing what we like, as seems to be popularly imagined, but ceasing to deceive ourselves.

Fundamentally, Buddhism is just a technique of self-undeception. This is not easy, though sometimes it may be fun. It needs some study of theory as well as practice. It is perfectly true that you never gain enlightenment by intellectual knowledge alone, but if you haven't studied the theory to some extent you will almost certainly never be able to start properly on the practice. Before you can develop your intuition you must know what it is—or at least what it isn't—and self-deception in this respect seems to come terribly easy to many people. Intuition, or as I much prefer to call it, insight, is not an emotion, but the best way to develop it is by getting to know one's emotions as thoroughly as possible. When these emotions have been really seen for what are, they no longer stand in the light. Now the biggest emotional blockage we have is that which surrounds the ego-idea. Since it is to the ultimate elimination of this idea that the whole Buddhist training is directed, it may be as well to have a good look at it. In so

doing we may get a shock.

By the ego (or self) in Buddhism we mean of course the concept of "I am," though this is much more a feeling than a purely intellectual concept—which is the very reason why it is so much more difficult to uproot. From the psychological point of view we must take it to include not only what, in Freudian terms, is called the ego, but also the id and even the super-ego. Though not wholly adequate, the Freudian conception goes a good way toward giving us the basic idea. This ego of ours is a complex and dynamic set of functions which are not by any means all conscious or under any form of normal conscious control. Its nature is in fact blind ignorance and it fights desperately to maintain that ignorance. It is most important for us to realize from the outset that this is the case, because this is the root-cause of all our troubles. The three unhealthy roots of human nature are greed, hatred, and ignorance, and all our suffering is due to these three. Ignorance is the most fundamental, and greed and hate spring from it.

Now the power of ignorance is broken by knowledge, which is seeing correctly. So all we have to do is to learn to see. A-VID-YA; "unwitting" or not seeing is no mere passive principle—it is an active force which opposes discovery of the truth at every turn. No need to look for an external devil: the Father of Lies is within every one of us. We all know the story of the Emperor's new clothes. In Buddhism the precise opposite of this situation occurs: the clothes go walking in the procession, but there's no emperor

inside them. The whole show is laid on for the honour and glory of a character who doesn't really exist. Here, then, is our second paradox, and it is certainly no less startling than the first one: the ego is the most ruthlessly gluttonous all-devouring monster there is, and yet really all the time there's no such thing! All its activities without exception are simply "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." How can we solve *this* riddle? How can we ever come to grasp the nature of this peculiar monster that "has no mouth and no belly, yet gobbles up the entire world" (as some old Chinese monk might have said, but probably didn't)?

Clearly there must be a sense in which the self exists and another sense in which it doesn't. Let us first of all have a frank look at it in the sense of something existing. It is not a pretty sight. Underneath all our lofty ideals, our pious thoughts and holy aspirations, we are all alike. *Our* little personal petty self is the really important thing to us. It is out to grab all it can get, whether in the way of affection and admiration and sympathy or of more apparently tangible satisfactions in the way of sex, money, power, nice things to eat and drink and smell and touch and hear—*all* sorts of things and it doesn't care in the very least how it gets them. We don't all want—at least consciously—all of these things perhaps, but we usually want a lot of credit for not wanting some of them or at least doing without them, even if by necessity rather than choice. All these are aspects of greed including the last, which is of course conceit. They are the

things the ego fattens on. Equally impressive and perhaps even more horrifying is the list of items under the heading of hate; we are all capable in our minds of murderous rage, sadism, treachery, and disloyalty of every conceivable kind. Until we have found and identified the seeds of *all* these things in our own hearts, we cannot claim to have made much progress in self-knowledge.

Of course most of us will never yield to such impulses, which may only be very faint; but until a higher stage of development has been reached they will not be totally eliminated as tendencies. The most likely way in which they may find some outward expression will be, perhaps, in the form of over-emotive indignation at the acts of hate committed by somebody else.

What can we do about this situation? First, face it. Second, penetrate to its roots. Buddhism is not something airy-fairy or romantic, it is *practical*. It is first and last something to *do*. To penetrate to the roots of greed, hatred, and delusion is not very easy and it requires certain methods or techniques. But the great thing is to keep going and not be diverted by irrelevancies, interesting by-paths, plausible excuses or pseudo-mystical fantasies, born of conceit and ignorance. A certain discipline is required, in fact. This can be summed up in one word—restraint. Restraint is not repression. In its simplest form it can be something as apparently "easy" as sitting still. It is just not automatically yielding to every impulse that arises while not, on the other hand, pretending that that impulse does not exist. A good part of Buddhism,

in modern terms, is "sales-resistance": cultivating at least a degree of immunity to the appeals of the outside world which are today constantly attempting, quite deliberately and purposefully, to arouse new desires within us. It is being deaf to the blandishments of the hidden persuaders whether from within or without, or better perhaps, hearing them without reacting. Who is the rich man who, like the camel, cannot pass through the eye of the needle? He is not only the millionaire, the expense-account johnnie, the take-over charlie: he is anybody who has too many *mental* encumbrances, too many *wants*.

Here then is an exercise: sit down with a straight back for ten minutes resolved not to make a single voluntary bodily movement during that time, and just *observe* what happens. You may get some surprises, but whatever happens you are bound to learn something. If you find, as will probably be the case, that a lot of thoughts and mental images arise, try to discover where they come from, to catch them at the very moment of arising. You won't succeed easily, but you will begin to see something of the mechanism of desires and emotions, and this is immensely valuable. Perhaps the most widespread meditational practice in all schools of Buddhism is *ānāpānasati* or mindfulness of breathing. Just watch the ebb and flow of your breath without interfering and, as far as you can manage, with undivided attention. This is the surest way to achieve calm, concentration, self-knowledge, and insight.

There is no Buddhism worthy of the name without practice,

but study is also required. This is especially so in the West, where we have not the background of Buddhist thought which exists in Eastern countries. We have to learn as adults what Eastern people have absorbed from childhood. The study of Buddhist theory should therefore not be neglected. Those who deny its necessity do so usually out of conceit, laziness, or ignorance—or a combination of all three.

The obvious problem which arises here is: "Where shall I start?" There are many schools of Buddhism and their scriptures, even those readily available in English, are voluminous. There is Theravada and Mahāyāna, in the form of Zen, Tibetan Buddhism and several other varieties. There are numerous books about most of them. Unguided and indiscriminate reading will only lead to mental indigestion. The obvious thing is to get down to basics. If we ask where these basic principles are set out, the answer is in the Pali Canon of the Theravada school. In fact, the seeds of all later, so-called Mahāyāna developments are there in this basic Buddhism.

The only reason why some people find Theravada Buddhism apparently unsatisfying is its seemingly negative approach. In the Mahāyāna schools there is greater explicit stress on two things: compassion and the higher wisdom. But we need not worry. Compassion grows inevitably as one trains oneself in Buddhism, and the higher wisdom cannot be gained until the lower wisdom has been developed. It is to this task that the basic training is directed. Before we can begin to grasp the nature of Reality,

which is transcendental, we must first grasp the nature of the mundane, the phenomenal world as our senses present it to us. This basically means knowing ourselves. Knowing ourselves means facing our own insecurity. Recognizing the equal insecurity of others is compassion.

Why do we feel so insecure? If we can answer this question, we are on the right track. It is due to our recognition that all things are transient. We seek to achieve a stability in the world which, by the very nature of things, cannot be. But Buddhism teaches us more than this: all things are not only transient, they are "empty." This applies to our precious selves as much as to anything else. Man, said the Buddha, is a mere compound of five things, the five *khandhas* or aggregates. He has a physical body, feelings, perceptions, emotional reactions, and consciousness. None of these constitutes any sort of a "self" which is permanent and unchanging, nor is there any such thing outside of them. His consciousness is just a series of states of awareness, conditioned by the other factors, reaching back into a limitless past. All we are actually aware of is the present moment, or rather consciousness *is* just that awareness. There is no separate entity behind it which is *aware*. In the jargon of some modern philosophers, everything about man is contingent or adjectival, not substantival. The further implications of this must be left for study and meditation, but this is a fundamental principle of all Buddhism. The search for a "self" behind all this is futile. If you don't believe this you can try to take up the Buddha's challenge

and find it.

There may well be a strong feeling of resistance to the acceptance of this point. If so, this feeling itself should be very carefully examined. It is the basis of our habitual ego-reactions. We *want* so badly to have a "self" and we expend a vast amount of energy in trying to build one up and support it in every way we can think of. That, fundamentally, is why we feel insecure in the world. One could usefully devote a good deal of time meditating on this point alone.

The most notable contribution made to psychology by Alfred Adler was his analysis of the inferiority complex. People who, for one reason or another, feel inferior, says Adler, tend to over-compensate and present an appearance of conceit and aggressiveness. Since Adler's psychology is very much one of social adaptation at not, perhaps, a very profound level, he did not pursue this idea as far as he might have done. But as far as it goes it is quite good Buddhism, though we might prefer to rename his complex the "insecurity complex." We might even go so far as to say that for the Buddhist everybody's ego practically consists of an inferiority or insecurity complex, for such an assumption certainly explains a great deal. Every form of ostentation we may indulge in is a way of bolstering up the ego, whether in cruder or subtle form. The large car which seems designed as wide as possible is as much an example of ego-boosting as the padded shoulders worn by the tough: indeed the resemblance is sometimes striking. Of course the

compensation for insecurity may take a reverse form of exaggerated modesty and simpering sweetness, or of unnecessary and slightly ostentatious self-sacrifice. This latter is a form of compensation we may choose when all else fails, and it has the advantage of making us feel very holy. Martyrdom is in fact the last consolation of a disappointed ego. And the hallmark of a person who has really gone far in the conquest of self is genuine unobtrusiveness.

The formula of Dependent Origination shows by selecting twelve prominent factors how it is that we go round and round the weary circle of rebirths, and how karma operates. It is not a simple formula of "causation" but rather of conditioning. Ignorance (*avijjā*) is a necessary condition for our being here—hence if we were not ignorant we would not have been reborn. And birth is a necessary condition for death—if we had never been born we could not die. Thus, too, feeling based on sense-impression is a necessary condition for the arising of craving: if there were no such feeling there would be no craving. But we can stop the craving from arising or at least prevent its developing into grasping. *This* is the point at which karma comes into play. Karma is volitional activity born of desire, and as such produces pleasant or unpleasant results in the future. Whatever condition of body and mind we happen to be in now is due to our past karma; it is *vipāka* or karma-resultant. In accordance with the *vipāka* we are liable to act in the future, but if we have understanding we can control our

future actions, and thus their future effects.

The aim of Buddhist training, of whatever school, is to break away from the cycle of becoming. This means somehow attaining the Transcendental Reality which is not karma-bound and therefore permanent, secure, and free from suffering. We do not, as unenlightened individuals, know what this is: at best we have a vague intuition of something wholly other. Its true nature is hidden from us by the veils of our ignorance. The state of enlightenment is called Nirvana (*Nibbāna* in Pali), which is, be it noted, selfless (*anattā*). This means that we cannot grasp it as long as the self-concept (or feeling) is operative. It is beyond the realm of duality, which is that of subject and object, or self and other-than-self.

Probably most people have at times had a feeling while in the normal sense "wide awake" as if really they were dreaming and would soon wake up. This is actually quite true as far as the first part is concerned. Life, as we know it, is in one sense a dream. The Buddha was the Awakened One, and our normal state is perhaps somewhere about half-way between ordinary sleep and true enlightenment, or wakefulness. We can therefore usefully regard the Buddhist training, if we like, as a way of making ourselves wake up. Sometimes in sleep we become aware of being asleep and want to wake up. Eventually we succeed, but it is often a struggle. The struggle to wake up to enlightenment is far greater than this, because the resistance is stronger. The resistance is stronger for a very simple reason: to the ego it

seems like death. This is fair enough, since in fact it *is* the death of ego. And since we have no real experience of the egoless state, it is unimaginable and therefore we are sceptical about it, but this scepticism too really springs from fear. We should have to give up all our attachments to attain it, and that is too high a price to pay. We are like the rich young man to whom Christ said "Sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor." He went sorrowfully away.

What then must we do, now that we have taken the first step and embarked on the course of Buddhism? We need to have a chart and compass to help us on our way. But first we have to know where we are supposed to be going. The goal of Buddhism is Enlightenment or Awakening or Nirvana, the Deathless State, which is the end of all suffering and frustration, the one permanent and supremely desirable thing. Buddhism claims to be a way of attaining this. There are five factors to be developed which, if they are predominant in our minds, will tend increasingly to bring us to the goal. They are Faith, Energy, Mindfulness, Concentration, and Wisdom. The first of these may come as a surprise to some people. "I thought," they may say, "you didn't have to have *faith* in Buddhism." In fact faith is an important factor to develop. We can call it confidence or trust if we prefer it. But unless we have *some* confidence that there is such a goal as Nirvana, we shall not even start taking Buddhism seriously at all, and we need also to trust the Buddha as the teacher who has shown the way to reach that goal. At the very least we need to be free from the sort

of nihilistic scepticism which is so common today and which prevents us from believing wholeheartedly in *anything* worthwhile. When we say "I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha" we are expressing faith in the Teaching and the Order of monks who have preserved it and handed it on.

If we have faith we next need to put forth effort, so we need energy. Right Effort is a step of the Eightfold Path. It means getting rid of wrong states of mind and developing right ones. Clearly a certain amount of vigour is required to do this, and faith will strengthen our will to persevere. Clearing up our mental muddle calls for increased self-knowledge, and this is gained by Mindfulness. Mindfulness is being aware of one's own nature and observing one's own reactions, being fully cognizant of what one is about all the time. It is developed by training, such exercises as mindfulness on breathing and on walking being especially beneficial. With full mindfulness, self-deception becomes impossible. It is the way of uncovering the subterfuges of the ego. The Buddha described it as "the one and only way" to the liberation of beings. It is an absolutely indispensable factor in all Buddhist training. Being mindful one is, too, in some degree automatically concentrated, but the practice of mental concentration can be carried further, to *samādhi*, which is mental one-pointedness. By a combination of these two factors, the mind can be sharpened to an instrument capable of cutting through the veils of ego-created illusion. The last of the five factors is Wisdom. Wisdom in this

connection means discernment. It includes investigation of all mental phenomena to their essence, which is voidness. When this lower, still mundane wisdom has been sufficiently developed, a basis has been created for the arising of the higher Insight-Wisdom, the perfection of which is Enlightenment. When this has been attained, the job is done.

But these factors must be developed in such a manner that they are properly balanced. Faith must be balanced with Wisdom, and Energy with Concentration. Faith without Wisdom can overreach itself and turn into that kind of blind faith which Buddhism does not encourage. On the other hand, Wisdom without Faith is sterile. Energy unaccompanied by Concentration can easily lead to restlessness, while Concentration without sufficient Energy leads to sloth. It is the function of Mindfulness, by watching over the other factors, to see that the proper balance between them is maintained. These five factors are called *indriyas* or "ruling factors." This means that they can and should dominate the mind and give it direction. They are the five guides to keep us on the way. Having taken the first step, and with these as guides, but especially under the leadership of Mindfulness, let us walk on.

Detachment

by M.O'C. Walshe

One way of regarding the Buddhist training is to consider it under the aspect of detachment. Detachment is one of those simple things which we discover to be very profound and in its higher stages intensely difficult. By becoming progressively more detached, one gradually penetrates to the heart of Buddhism. Its importance is repeatedly stressed under various aspects throughout the whole range of the Buddhist scriptures. For instance, in the formula describing how one enters the first *jhāna*: "Detached from sensual objects, O monks, detached from unwholesome states of mind, the monk enters into first *jhāna* which is accompanied by initial and sustained application (*vitakka-vicāra*), is born of detachment (*viveka*) and filled with rapture and joy." The second *jhāna* is then said to be "born of concentration." We thus see that detachment is a prerequisite for all concentration. The calm and concentrated mind is the detached mind. While this is obvious enough when we stop to think about it, it may help us to realize why it is that, even in purely mundane matters, we so often fail to

concentrate our minds. We all know the picture of the man with furiously knitted brows and a wet towel round his head, who is desperately trying to "concentrate" on some problem. Of course, he usually fails. The reason, surely, is not far to seek: he is going about it precisely the wrong way. He is not detached. He is in fact very much *at*tached. He may be detached from sense-objects for the moment, but not from unwholesome states of mind. His state of mind is probably dominated by *uddhacca-kukkucca* "restlessness and worry," and so long as this remains the case he will probably get nowhere with his problem. His body too, reflecting this mental tension, is probably tense and strained. He should first try to relax, physically as well as mentally, and then he might make some progress.

At this point perhaps we might pause to consider an objection which is not infrequently made to the cultivation of detachment. There are people who positively regard it as morally wrong to be detached. One should not, they say, become detached and aloof from life, but should be actively involved in it—*engage* as the French say. For them, detachment is the equivalent of that opprobrious term we used to hear so much about—"escapism." Their argument is of course a very simple one: there is so much evil in the world of one kind or another that it is our job to go out and fight it. Now I am not going to argue that such people—let us call them as a generic term crusaders as opposed to introspectives—do not on occasion do a lot of good. A society which has a few dedicated crusaders is certainly, in

its mundane way, healthier than one that discourages or represses their activities. They often succeed in abolishing, or at least reducing, much genuine evil. Let us take off our hats to them, and perhaps even on occasion join or support them. But let us also consider their position a little more closely. *Why* does the average "crusader" function as he does—irrespective of the particular cause he elects to take up? What *really* makes him tick? The answer to this question may put the whole matter in a rather different light.

Most of our crusader friends, whether they go in for party politics or for other similar, perhaps semi-political causes they believe in, are convinced that they do so out of love for their fellow-beings, whether human or animal. In part, this is certainly true. They do, passionately, want to help the poor, the sick, the oppressed, the suffering. Yet in fact their motives are usually not quite as pure as they themselves honestly believe them to be. The key to the situation lies, I think, in the word "passionately." They are under the sway of emotions, not all of which are, in the Buddhist view, entirely healthy. Conceit often plays a large if probably quite unconscious part. And surprisingly often too they are really moved far more by hate than by loving-kindness. Hatred, even of the oppressor or the criminal, is not really the right motive because it is not grounded in the right view.

I am not seeking to disparage these people or belittle their efforts, but merely to elucidate something of their attitude in the context of my theme, which is detachment. So let us take

a concrete example: one where I was and remain wholeheartedly in agreement with their aims. In Britain we have abolished capital punishment, rightly, I believe, though the increase in crime in recent years has led to demands for its reintroduction. Those who campaign for this even claim to be in the majority, though I doubt if this is true, and I certainly do not share their viewpoint. They too are "crusaders," and their reaction is certainly an emotional one. They really seek, without knowing it, a "safe" or "legitimate" outlet for their own aggression. These emotions are in turn rooted in their own basic feelings of insecurity. The trouble is, of course, that such emotions as these (and this is a comparatively mild example, in the world today!), when held collectively are always much worse than when merely held by an individual, not only on account of being multiplied, but because of being at a more primitive level.

It is possible, though I hope and believe unlikely, that pressures for the reintroduction of capital punishment in Britain will build up again to a serious point. Should this be the case, those who wish to oppose such a trend will need to be very careful indeed of their own state of mind. They must not let themselves be trapped in an opposite emotional reaction. They will need to find a way of reducing the build-up of emotional tension so that in a calmer atmosphere wiser counsels may have a chance to prevail. Emotional appeals would anyway, in such a situation, probably be useless, since the stronger emotions would be ranged on the other side. If you want, in fact, to abolish capital

punishment you must not want to hang the executioner. Supporters of capital punishment often claim that its opponents show too much sympathy for the murderer and not enough for his victim. It does not seem too much to ask that a Buddhist—or a Christian—should be able to feel compassion for both, and even for the hangman as well, for he is certainly not creating much good karma for himself.

I am not at all arguing that a Buddhist should necessarily and always stand aloof from such campaigns as the—now—rather theoretical one mentioned. I *am* arguing that whatever he does he should know his own true motives, his real emotional reasons for either acting or not acting. I would also suggest that it is truly necessary for society as a whole, as for the individual concerned, that there should be those who in fact keep aloof from the current problems that happen to agitate the world at any moment. It is not for our crusading friends to disparage those who are genuinely detached. If the crusader *for*, say, capital punishment is a victim of his own unresolved aggression and insecurity, how often is not his opponent in virtually the same case! A slight shift in viewpoint or circumstances, and sometimes the roles are even reversed…

The reformer looks around him and sees something wrong in society. This is usually not difficult, as there are plenty of things wrong with most societies, and it may be almost a matter of chance what particular evil or abuse he happens to pick on. What does he do then? He becomes what is significantly called an agitator. Now you can only agitate

others if you yourself are agitated. What has *really* happened to our would-be-reformer is that, his own emotions having been suitably stirred up, he feels it his duty to go out and stir up the emotions of other people. I know. I have gone through this phase myself. If you suggest to him that he should first calm his own emotions he is aggrieved, thereby developing some more agitation. He will probably tell you that this is the easy way out, and he may even admit that in any case he doesn't know how to do it—thereby, incidentally, contradicting the notion that it is "easy." Of course, if you *can* get him that far it may be possible to indicate to him the contradiction involved. If he cannot help *himself* to that extent, how can he expect to be able to help others? Even in the field of Buddhism there are those who seem to think they can become Bodhisattvas and "liberate all beings" without first liberating themselves. They should take to heart the words of the great Zen patriarch Hui-neng, who told his pupils "to deliver an infinite number of sentient beings of our own mind."

Let us leave world-problems now and turn to the problem of our own minds. What is it that we have to get detached from? In a sense, of course, it is from the outside world. That at least is how it seems to us. Let us not get involved in a metaphysical discussion about whether there really *is* an outside world or not. In point of fact, from the standpoint of the Buddhist training it scarcely matters whether there is or not! Perhaps we just project the whole thing from some mysterious inner centre. In any case, what we have to get

rid of is our excessive preoccupation with it—that is to say, with the things of the senses. What actually happens is this: we have an unsatisfactory feeling in the only place we *can* have it—within ourselves (*whatever*, philosophically, that means). This feeling may take many forms, but whatever its precise nature or mode of manifesting, it is something unpleasant, i.e., what in Buddhism is known as *dukkha*. It may be quite vague in character, but we feel it somehow nevertheless. We therefore look out into the world, either to see what it is, out there, that is supposedly causing this *dukkha*, or to help us forget it, by grasping at something which we assume to be pleasant. The result in either case is not really very satisfying, because we are not even looking in the right direction. But creatures of habit as we are, we are strongly conditioned to look outside, and indeed nature has equipped us to looking outside with some remarkably efficient sense-organs for doing so.

With our outward-turned senses we can do various things about the world we see, ,hear, smell, taste, and touch. We can try to grasp something outside and extract enjoyment from it. We can try to alter what we see in some way to make it conform more to our idea of what it ought to be like. Or, we can vent our ill-temper on it in a fit of destructiveness. There is a lot of this sort of senseless destructiveness about nowadays. There always has been, really, but we have now made it a special problem, the "problem of modern youth." The truth is simply that modern youth has in some ways rather more opportunities

for being destructive than it used to have. This is due in large measure to the nature and values of the society we live in, a society which has developed more efficient means of destruction than were ever dreamed of before. The fact that it has also developed more wealth and therefore more means of apparent enjoyment, available to more people than ever before, does not seem to have done very much to reduce the general feeling of dissatisfaction each one of us has deep down inside. All this, of course, goes a long way toward confirming the Buddhist analysis of the situation, that the origin of this suffering, this *dukkha*, lies in craving. Our society is built up all along the line. We accordingly have the simultaneous picture of more and more people craving for more and more things, and quite often getting them, and of both society and individuals showing more and more taste for bigger and bigger forms of "motiveless" destruction. Greed and hate, in fact, are perhaps more nakedly at work in our society than ever before. That means that they are at work in every one of us, and they can only be dealt with in, and by, each one of us individually.

Greed and hate arise from ignorance: from not understanding, not seeing the true situation as it really is. The individual is a microcosm of society, and each one of us reflects this situation, in some form, individually. Now it may be very dreadful, but so far nobody has found a way whereby society can collectively overcome its ignorance, and set itself fundamentally to rights. Even the Buddha did not show a method of bringing this about—and if *he*

couldn't find a way, it is unlikely that anybody else will. But for each individual there *is* a way:

Sabba pāpassa akaraṇaṃ,
kusalassa upasampada
sacittapariyodapanaṃ: etaṃ
Buddhanusāsanaṃ

Cease to do evil,
learn to do good.
Purify your own mind:
that is the teaching of all Buddhas.

And one of the prerequisites of purifying one's own mind is the cultivation of detachment. If we ask "Detachment from what?"—the answer is "from the five hindrances: sensual craving and ill-will, sloth, restless worry and indecision." These are things we all know only too well, and though their final conquest is difficult, they are things we can detach our minds from temporarily with a little effort. The first two of these are obviously aspects of greed and hate. Probably we can see that there is a need to cut these down as much as possible. But if we fail to do so it may be, at least in part, because one of the other three hindrances is preventing us: we may be too indolent or too excited, or we may dither in a state of indecision and doubt.

Now the trouble is that we may see quite clearly, in a way, that our emotions of, say, greed or hate or fear are overmastering us and yet feel quite unable to do anything

about them. Then we probably dismiss the whole problem with the words "Oh yes, that's all very well, but I just haven't got the will-power." In fact it is just here that the value of detachment comes in. What we think of as failure of will-power may really be much more a failure of technique. Let us take the case of a man who, as he thinks and as others probably also think, cannot control his temper. The deeper reasons for this may be various, but they will probably include some strong form of frustration or repression. It is not very difficult to see that the chances of gaining control of any situation are likely to be increased the more one understands the situation. Now what is called repression in psychology is really a "thrusting away"—in other words it is basically a *refusal* to see something, a form of deliberate (even though "unconscious") self-deception. In order to gain insight into the situation, we must have some willingness to understand it. So we need to realize here, right at the outset, that there is a form of clinging to ignorance. In order to cope with this there must be a degree of detachment—we must be able to regard the situation coolly and simply learn not to *mind* too much whatever it is we may be about to discover. We must be prepared to stop working on the old and foolish principle "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

It is possible that even this much of the chain of events may be fairly clear to us, and yet we may still not feel able to go any further. Intellectual awareness of an emotional situation is not in itself enough, though this does not mean it is of no

use. It is just a preliminary stage, and it should be strongly emphasized that progress is in stages. The desire for perfection at a single jump is just another obstacle born of impatience and conceit. It is not an "all-or nothing" situation, but a case of "one step at a time." Perhaps we have already laid a certain foundation on which progress can be made, even without realizing it. For the man who has said to himself "I haven't the will power to correct this fault" has at least made one vital admission. He has in some measure accepted his own inadequacy—in fact he is *too much* aware of this. He has to learn that what he really lacks is not necessarily will-power as much as insight. The next step, then, is merely and simply to recognize *this* fact. It will prove more helpful than may at first appear. For in fact seeing ourselves as we are *is* the cure.

The next step, then, is to find out why we do not already "see ourselves as we are." The answer is, of course, as already indicated, that we don't want to, that there is a clinging to ignorance. Why this should be so is perhaps after all not hard to see. To the person with normal eyesight, physical blindness is a terrible thing. We can only too well imagine the feeling of helplessness and insecurity the blind person must suffer from. It is therefore not at all nice to think that though our physical eyes may be all right, we suffer from mental blindness. So we prefer to be blind to the blindness. This is attachment to ignorance with a vengeance. No wonder it is frustrating, for it is a terrible strain to keep up. Most of our unhealthy emotions are nothing but by-

products of this tension, caused by deliberately keeping our mental eyes tight shut while all the time pretending they are wide open. Only the practice of mindfulness can help us here.

What is mindfulness? There are professing Buddhists who are extremely vague about what mindfulness really is, and there are even some who are so afraid of it that they go about telling themselves and others that it is not really necessary. In principle, mindfulness is quite simple. It is just detached watching. Watching one's breathing is a method that suits practically everybody. First of all it brings calm, which enables one to watch one's thoughts and emotions more easily, and reduces the fear of what may come up—an important point sometimes. If mindfulness is pursued for a while, some such experience as the following may occur: a kind of "unreal" feeling may arise in which one seems to be aware of various emotional states (perhaps self-pity, anger, or the like) without being fully involved in them. One may start thinking "Am I really having this emotion or not? Am I somehow putting on an act?" What is really happening is that feelings are simply being experienced with detachment. And in such a state one can allow many things to come up to the surface which were previously repressed. But being detached, one is not trapped by these emotional states and sees them as mere effects of past conditioning. And in this way they can be harmlessly dissolved.

The interesting thing is that, when such a situation is operative, everything really seems to go on just as before,

with only one slight difference: "I" am not fully in the situation. There may be even a distinct feeling of puzzlement as to precisely where "I" am anyway. Am I, for instance, the emotion or the watcher? Or neither, or both? By following up this particular clue we may find that the practice leads us on further to a greater degree of understanding of the impersonality of all things—of our own fundamental egolessness, in fact. The point is here simply that by becoming calm and detached we have, so to speak, "accepted the unacceptable." As a result of this practice we shall find a reduction in our own feeling of tension, greater calm and, most probably, some increased insight into our own nature and the way things *really* work.

We can now see the practical answer to our ill-tempered friend's problem. He cannot restrain his temper by will-power but by detached mindfulness he can gradually dissolve it. And the same applies, of course, to all our failings and weaknesses. But there is one form of attachment we must guard especially against, because it makes the cure much more difficult. This is conceit. We all have conceit, of course, but if it is strong it is a particularly dangerous obstacle to progress. Conceit is really attachment to a false picture of the ego. Put negatively, it is a refusal to accept oneself as one is. It may manifest in the feeling "I cannot possibly have these weaknesses," or "I have overcome these weaknesses." Combined with, for instance, sexual repression it may take the form of a sort of "purity complex": "I am above all these horrid feelings of sex, they

no longer exist for me," and the like. Perhaps this particular complex has become less common since greater openness on sexual matters has become usual. In any case, it is clear that for a person who does have this kind of attitude the development of true detachment, and hence mindfulness, will be exceptionally difficult. We must not be ashamed to admit to *ourselves* (if not perhaps necessarily to others) that we possess our full share of *all* the normal human weaknesses.

At this point there comes an interesting and subtle twist. You may say "Yes, I suppose that's true. But somehow there *are* a few things down there inside me which I just *can't* bring myself to face." Now this is of course quite different from denying that they are there at all. It means in fact that repression, i.e., self-deception, has *not* been completely successful. Now it may indeed be true that to face up fully to some of the contents of one's unconscious may be too hard to bear. It might be impossible to maintain detachment. Emotional involvement and perhaps even quite serious trouble might result. But there is still a way. What we *can* do is to accept honestly that precise situation: "There is a dark corner where I still dare not to look." It is the mental equivalent of saying "I have a sore place which I dare not touch." The technique from then on is basically the same as before, only at one remove. There is just a secondary emotion of fear to be dissolved before the primary situation which is the cause of that fear can be investigated. If that secondary fear is treated with the

detachment we have used on other and less frightening emotions, it too can be dissolved. Later we may even look back and wonder why it was that we ever feared to look in that particular dark corner.

To sum up: detachment is not a kind of selfish flight from the world, but the necessary precondition for coping with the world. It is absolutely essential as a means of dealing with our own emotions. Nor is it in any way incompatible with charity or compassion—as indeed any doctor or nurse can tell you. It is no "escapism" as is sometimes alleged, but its very opposite. The degree of physical detachment and withdrawal which the individual undertakes may vary considerably—obviously it will be much greater for the monk than for the average lay person. There can be no successful higher meditation without detachment from the things of the senses, and it is an essential ingredient of Right Mindfulness. Incidentally it can even be quite fun. By being detached we can observe ourselves with ironic amusement. By so doing we may suddenly discover that some of the things about ourselves that we took with deadly seriousness are in fact extremely funny. In that way we may find that detachment actually enables us to enjoy our own *dukkha*!

Notes

1. That is, he is concerned about the welfare of the monastic community, with which he is connected.

2. That is, he places the Dhamma before self and worldly considerations; this refers to the three dominant influences (*adhipateyya*), Dhamma being the third, after *atta* (self) and *loka* (world); see AN 3.40.

3. See E.F.S. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, (Blond & Briggs, London, 1973), p. 48ff., "Buddhist Economics"; H.N.S. Karunatilaka, *This Confused Society* (Buddhist Information Centre, Colombo, 1976); Dr. Padmasiri de Silva, *Buddhist Economics* (**Bodhi Leaves No. 69**).

4. Complete freedom from the sexual urge.

5. To the latter belong films, pictures, and literature which are chiefly intended to provide sexual titillation.

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