

APPENDIX

THE BUDDHIST CONCEPTION OF REALITY

I. THE FUNDAMENTAL TENETS OF BUDDHISM CONCERNING REALITY

BUDDHISM is a comprehensive system of thought. In it we find a materialistic school, which denied the existence of the mind and affirmed the reality of the external world; there was also an extreme idealistic school, which explained all perceptions and phenomena as illusions. Moreover, in Buddhist thought, philosophical theories are intricately interwoven with religious faith regarding the person of the founder; and, similarly, the various ways of practising contemplation are inseparable from ethical considerations which bear upon the religious, or ecclesiastical, community. The mind is minutely analyzed; yet Buddhist psychology was not a theoretical study, but was considered to be a means of introspection in meditation, which in turn very much influenced the psychological theories in question. The law of causation was the chief tenet of Buddhist cosmology; but for Buddhism this conception was highly teleological, being understood in the sense of moral retribution. Morality is taught, of course; and every Buddhist is expected to observe its rules; the moral ideal, however, was not limited to human life, but extended to all kinds of existence, visible and invisible. A religious ethic, or a philosophical religion, or a religious philosophy — each one of these designations may be applied to Buddhism; while in the numerous schools within it different points have been given prominence.

Thus, to abstract a phase of Buddhist thought, apart from other factors, is as if one were to dissect a human body into parts, and treat one of them as a unit. As a Buddhist simile expresses

it, none of the numerous diamonds studded on a net can be touched without affecting all the others. Yet I shall try here to take up one aspect of Buddhist thought concerning reality. It would be an altogether hopeless task, if there were not a certain continuity of thread even in the meshes of a net. And this continuity is given in the conception of Dhammā, which means "law," or "truth." This is one of the Buddhist Trinity, the others being Buddha and Sangha, that is, the person of the founder and the community of believers. This Trinity is the foundation of the Buddhist religion, and none of the three is perfect apart from the others. It will presently appear how the Buddhist conception expressed in the idea of Dhammā is supported by, and connected with, the faith in Buddha, the revealer of truth. But I shall start with the idea of Dhammā, apart from the other terms of the Trinity.

Dhammā (in Sanskrit, *Dharma*) is a very flexible term in Buddhist terminology. It meant originally, in the Brahmanic idea, "what endures," that is the law of social order. Buddha adopted this term, divorced from its association with social sanction, and used it to designate his teachings about the truths of existence. These teachings were expressed in words and preserved in writings, although to the Buddhist they were not merely letters or words, but truths, and therefore things, as well. Buddha is the revealer of truths as they are in reality, and the doctrines are proclaimed in accordance with the reality of things. That is the reason why the word Dhammā, especially when used in the plural, means things, or conditions, or realities, both mental and physical. These things and conditions are not products of chance, but exist and change according to the definite order of laws, or truths. This order of truth is expressed pre-eminently by the law of causation, which is assumed by Buddhism to be universal and irrevocable throughout all changes of the world. "That being present, this comes to be; because that has arisen, this arises" — this is the key-note of the Buddhist view of the world. The law of causation is applied to the physical and

mental orders of existence, to the subjective and objective aspects of our being. It is the essential nature of things and processes that they are through and through ruled by the same Dhammā of causation.

Partly because of the assumption of universal causality, and partly because of its religious ideal of communion, Buddhism assumes the basic unity of existence, notwithstanding the fact that it admits apparent diversity. We comprehend the Dhammā of the external existence, because the same Dhammā is inherent in us; we understand other people, because they are beings subsisting by the same Dhammā. Thus, the fundamental nature of all Dhammās is one and the same. The fundamental nature of existence (*dhammā*), in this sense of unity, is called *dhammatā*, that is, the essential quality of being subject to the laws of existence. Dhammās exist and become such as they are (*yathābhūtam*), and yet they are one in nature and in relation. Everything that is born and grows is subject to age, ills, and death — this is the essential nature of things. All Buddhas, of the past, present, and future, have attained, and will attain, the highest freedom by treading the same way of perfection — this is the universal qualification (*dhammatā*) of Buddhas. Buddha's teachings and injunctions aim at the purification of the mind, and are efficacious to lead us up to the supreme enlightenment — this is the invariable import of the Dhammā. The term Dhammatā applies to every one of these aspects of the universal nature. The same idea is expressed adverbially by the word *tathatayā*, that is, in accordance with nature, and as a noun by *tathatā*, i. e., "as it is," or "*Thalness*." Therefore, Buddha is called Tathāgata, the One who has attained the Truth of existence, the Dhammatā or Tathatā of the world, and has come to reveal the same truth to us. He is the Truth-winner and Truth-revealer. Because the Dhammatā is the same in him and us, his truth is revealed to us, and *we* are enlightened by the same truth.

The Dhammā is the truth revealed by Buddha, the Lord of Truth; yet he is not the creator of it. We are enlightened by the truths taught by him, but we can be thus enlightened because

our existence and nature are based on the same Dhammatā that is found in Buddha himself. The final Dhammatā is the fountain of Buddhist attainment and revelation, for Buddha as well as for ourselves. The world of Dhammās is a perpetually flowing stream; foam and flakes float on its surface, but one can attain the tranquil ocean of Nirvāna by pursuing the course of the stream; after all, one and the same is the water in the fountain, in the stream, and in the ocean. Seen in this way, the fundamental Dhammatā of things and beings is the source of illusion as well as of enlightenment, of vices as well as of virtues. One who does not realize this unity is in illusion, while one who has grasped the Dhammatā or Tathatā, is a Buddha. It is said:

All are subject to the laws (*dhammās*) of ill,
Of age, as well as of death;
Beings exist according to the laws.
(*yathā dhammā, tathā sūā*). (*Anguttara*, v. 57.)

The deluded are distressed by these changes, while the enlightened man is not troubled by them because he knows the truth. The Truth is permanent, even independent of persons who are troubled by it, or are enlightened in it. Again, it is said:

Where there is birth, age and death necessarily follow. This realm (of causal nexus) is perpetual, regardless of the Tathāgata's appearing or not appearing (in this world); and the stability of truth (*dhammā-tthiti*) and the order of truth (*dhammā-niyāmatā*) follow their necessary and natural concatenation. The Tathāgata has comprehended this, and penetrated into the Truth; having comprehended and penetrated into it, he announces and preaches it, makes it known, establishes and reveals it, and makes it clear and visible. (*Samyutta*, 12. 20.)

Herein is a point of great importance, which gave rise to two opposite interpretations of Buddha's teachings. One school understood in this thesis the permanent stability of the Dhammā, meaning thereby external existence; while the other interpreted the stability of truth as existing in our own mind. The difference may be stated thus: The school which emphasized the objective import of the Dhammā ran to an extreme verging on

materialism, asserting the reality of the external order, and denying the mind, on the ground of the doctrine of *non-ego*. The opposite direction was taken by the other school, which saw no meaning in what is usually spoken of as the objective world, apart from its significance as a manifestation of the universal Dhammatā. The consequence was that the truth of existence was to be realized only in the enlightened mind of a Buddha, and that, therefore, reality belonged, not to the world of visible diversity, but to the realm of transcendental unity. The former tendency was represented by the Sarvāsti-vādins, the men who asserted that "all exists"; who were opposed by nearly all others, though the extreme transcendental view was not universally accepted. Before taking up the opposition, we must inquire what Buddha's own position was.

Buddha always explicitly repudiated the two extremes, the Permanence-view (*Sassata-vāda*) and the Nihilistic view (*Uccheda-vāda*), that is, the views which either assert or deny the reality of the external world *per se*. He once said to his great disciple, Kaccāna:

The world, for the most part, holds either to a belief in being (*atthi*) or to a belief in non-being (*natthitam*). But for one who, in the light of the perfect insight, considers how the world arises, belief in the non-being of the world passes away. And for one who, in the light of the perfect insight, considers how the world ceases, belief in the being of the world passes away. . . . That all is existent (*sabbam atthi*) is one extreme; that all is non-existent (*sabbam natthi*) is another extreme. The Tathāgata, avoiding the two extremes, preaches his truth, which is the Middle Path.

(*Samyutta*, 12. 15; Warren, p. 165.)

The former view is that of common-sense realism, which Buddha refuted by showing how change and decay actually go on before our eyes. Buddha opposed this kind of realism, not by denying reality altogether, but by demanding a change in the conception of reality, a transfer of the idea of reality from the conception of permanent external existence to that of becoming ruled by the law of causation. On the other hand, the nihilistic

theory differs from Buddha's position in a very subtle manner, because Buddha rejects the idea of permanence, yet sees reality in things and processes; both being Dhammās by virtue of the same law. He accepts the assertion that nothing exists in the sense that nothing persists by itself; but he rejects the same assertion by making a counter-affirmation that reality consists in the stability and order of truth, of the law of causation. This is what he called the Middle Path, as he preached the Middle Path in his ethics, rejecting both the hedonistic life and ascetic self-mortification.

The Buddhist realism above referred to was in fact not so materialistic as it was believed to be by the opposing schools. Yet it concentrated its effort upon an analysis of the Dhammās, as if they were merely external existences, and neglected the significance of Buddha's Tathāgataship, which consisted in his having grasped the truth of existence in his enlightened mind. The realists missed the point in their conception of Dhammā, because they proceeded to its analysis, apart from the ideal interpretation of the Dhammās as given by Buddha himself. Thus, this school of realists was controverted by adducing the personal example of Buddha, and by emphasizing the significance of faith in him as the Tathāgata, in the conception and interpretation of reality. In other words, the opposition took the orthodox course of never separating the conception of Dhammā from the personality of Buddha as the Truth-winner and Truth-revealer.

Now, not speaking of the extreme transcendentalism, the orthodox theory of the Middle Path may be formulated in the following way:

Buddha has unquestionably said that the truth-order exists and works, regardless of whether a Tathāgata appears, or not. But, who among Buddhists could, without his revelation of Dhammā, have realized that truth? In fact, the external-realist asserts the truth-order in consequence of Buddha's teaching; and Buddha taught this because the truth was grasped by him. This we say, not merely in the sense that Buddha is our authority in this matter, but in the sense that the truth-order

would remain a meaningless entity or process, unless there were at least one man who had realized it and interpreted its meaning. Undoubtedly, the truth-order may be working, even while you or I do not realize it. Yet it has become known to us through Buddha's revelation, and then in our own enlightenment. Enlightenment and revelation are the essential factors in the nature of the truth-order, because the conception truth-order does not mean a dead entity, nor a merely external order, but implies a realization of its import in the enlightened mind, which represents the ideal order of existence.

Otherwise expressed, the world, the realm of truths (*dhammā-dhātu*), as a whole, is the stage on which the beings in the world attain their own Dhammatā; and therefore the world, subsisting by itself, but without knowing its own meaning—its own truth-order—is an imperfect manifestation of its real nature. Only a half, and the inferior half, of reality, of the real nature of existence, is rightly to be conceived as the merely external existence; the other half, the essential and integral half, is first revealed to us when we bring to light our own real nature. It is a realization of the Dhammatā, on my part or yours; this is, however, not a merely individual work, but the enlightenment of an individual mind as a part of the world, nay, as the key to the revelation and realization of its real nature. Reality (Sanskrit, *dharma-tathatā*, *dharma-svabhava*) is nothing but a full realization of the true nature; and in the true nature of the world, the ideal interpretation plays no less part than what is erroneously called external existence. The conception of reality becomes meaningless, unless an integral part, or aspect, is realized through at least one individual. What then is the significance of enlightenment on the part of an individual ?

Here is conspicuously shown the significance of Buddha's attainment and revelation, by which he plays an integral part in the world's truth-order, and herein lies the importance of his personality as the Truth-winner and Truth-revealer. It is in his person that the real import of existence has come to light; it is in his enlightenment in the fundamental nature (*dhammatā*) of the

world that the cosmos has found its own mouth-piece, the representative, the embodiment, of its truth-order; it is through his revelation that the world, including ourselves and many other beings of different sorts, has gained the key to the interpretation and comprehension of its real meaning. Knowing and seeing, enlightenment and revelation — all are nothing but the essential nature of the truth-order, by which the meaning of existence, and therefore of reality, is made explicit, or can be evolved. Wherefore it is said:

The Exalted One knows knowing, sees seeing; he is the One who has become the eyes (of the world); he is the One who has become knowledge (or enlightenment); he is the One who has become truth; he is the One who has become Brahmā (the highest deity of Brahmanism); he is the instructor, the revealer, the One who pours out good, the One who gives immortality; the Lord of Dhammā, that is the Tathāgata. (*Samyutta*, 35. 116, etc.)

Buddha, the Tathāgata, is the prototypical representative of the seer, of the knower, of the one who has realized his own true nature, together with that of the whole world. In short, Buddha's enlightenment is the interpretation of the world, which means not simply a process in an individual mind, but plays an integral part in the existence of the world, being a revelation of its own meaning — a self-realization of the world, so to speak. This is the view of the Middle Path.

Now, let me further expound the Buddhist conception of the relation between the world and the individual, which gives the key to the understanding of its conception of reality.

The individual, as such, is neither real, in the commonly asserted sense of being a personally persistent entity, nor unreal, in the sense that it has no place in existence. It is unreal, because it is subject to constant change; but it is real, as a product of causation, as a manifestation of character accumulated by karma. Either of these points of view leads to the thesis, "There is no (substantial) *ego*." But Buddhism sees in the person of the Tathāgata a real individual, *the individual par excellence*, because the Dhammatā of the universe is represented,

embodied, realized, in his person as the Tathāgata. It is in the personal enlightenment of universal truths in Buddha that the realm of Dhammā has come to self-consciousness, to the full realization of its meaning. In other words, the person of the Tathāgata is not an individual personality, in contradistinction to other individuals, but in communion with all others. When I say "all others," I mean it, not as an aggregate of separate individuals, nor as a haphazard crowd of individuals, but as unified in the basic unity of the Dhammatā, and united in the realization of the universal communion. This is the teaching of the *Ekayāna*, of which we shall see more presently. An individual, according to Buddhism, is no more a mere individual, if, and so far as, he identifies himself with others; his *ego* is transformed to a universal self. Buddhism does not call this transformed and expanded self a self, but a *Tathāgata*, or a "being of truth" (*dhammā-bhūto*, *dhammā-kāya*), as in the case of Buddha.

Looked at in this way, any individual is a Tathāgata who realizes the universal Dhammatā of the universe, not only in his ideas, but in his life, and lives the life of the universal self. So long as, and so far as, he regards himself as separate from others, every individual is only a partial, and therefore imperfect, manifestation of his own real nature (*dhammatā*), while every one is destined to attain the height, or depth, of his own true self in communion with all others, by virtue of the basic unity of the fundamental Dhammatā. When this ideal is attained, even partially, one has so far realized his real self, which is no longer an *ego* in the sense that he once cherished. He is the same person in appearance, but in reality his self is so far transformed. What thus happens resembles the metamorphosis of an insect. Buddha, in recalling his former lives, designates his former self by the pronoun "*I*," but he is at the same time most emphatic in distinguishing his former "*I*" — even the "*I*" when he lived as a prince or a recluse — and calls himself "*Tathāgata*," in the third person, as the designation of his true personality and high dignity. The same title may be applied to anybody who reaches

the same attainment as Buddha; and, in fact, Buddha called every one of the same attainment a Tathāgata. In short, every one who has found his own real nature in the fundamental Dhammatā of all existences, that is, in communion with the Tathāgatas, is one who has become truth, become insight, and thereby identified himself with the universe. It is in the conception of reality attained by such a person that the universe is realizing its universal Dhammatā.

A necessary consequence of this idea about the relation between the individual and the world is the teaching of the Ekayāna. It means the one and the same way for all the Tathāgatas of the past, present, and future. It is the Way, and at the same time the Ideal — the way to realize the truth of universal communion, and the ideal to be reached by that way. It is also the foundation of existences, and the goal of the way, because an ideal is vain without foundation, and the two are simply two aspects of the same Dhammatā. Buddha said:

The Perfectly Enlightened of the past, and the Buddhas of the future,
As well as the present Perfectly Enlightened One who dispels sorrows
from many —

All have lived, do live, or will live,

By revering Dhammā; this is the Dhammatā of all Buddhas.

(*Samyutta*, 6. 1. 2; com. S. 47. 18.)

This unity of the Ekayāna is manifested in the Buddhist community, which, though limited in its visible manifestation, is to be extended without limit to include all beings of every possible description, and of all ages. Thus, the Buddhist community is a realization of the universal communion of all Buddhas and Buddhas-to-be, who are—or ought to be—united in the revelation of the final Dhammatā. This is the reason why Buddha disdained any one who, being satisfied with the tranquillity of his mind, remains a solitary sage. Such a sage is called a Pacceka-buddha, or self-satisfied wise man, and is regarded not only as a selfish man, but one who does not see the real light, either his own, or that

of the world. The Tathāgata, on the contrary, is an individual who is no longer an individual merely, but has identified himself with all others.

Thus, the Tathāgata is the ideal person in the Buddhist religion, and it is only in the life of the Tathāgata that the full meaning of the universe is realized. This ideal is called also Dhammā, which here means "norm," as Mrs. Rhys Davids correctly renders it. The moral norm and religious ideal for every Buddhist consists in attaining, as Buddha has shown by his own example, the supreme enlightenment in the truth-order and the fundamental nature of the world, in accordance with the truth of existence, and by treading the same One Road, in company with the Buddhas of all ages. The Buddhist ideal, seen in this light, necessarily demands the life of fellowship, in which the real continuity of life, or the Dhammatā of existence, is first realized. In this fellowship, an individual no longer remains a separate being, but becomes a personal embodiment of the universal life — "das Objectwerden des Subjects," to borrow the Hegelian terminology. The "communion of saints" transforms *our* self into the universal self; and therein is brought to light the true nature of reality.

To sum up, the Buddhist conception of reality is the existence in which the universal nature of existence is realized in the enlightened mind which is the realization of the all-embracing fellowship. It rejects reality apart from this personal enlightenment; it rejects an enlightenment in a secluded self — the former being externalism and the latter transcendentalism. But both aspects of being embraced and "aufgehoben" in the realization of the universal Dhammatā. In short, the true conception of reality is brought to light only in the unity of Buddha, Dhammā, and Sangha.