

The Seer and the Seen

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I.

GENERALLY speaking, a religion is constructionally reducible to three component parts: founder, teaching, and organisation. These correspond to the Buddhist *tri-ratna*, triple treasure: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The founder is really the centre and the foundation of a religion, for without him it would never have come into existence. The teaching, of course, characterises it as distinguishable from other religions; and the organisation too has its own features as it has developed around the founder and in accordance with his spirit and teaching. Every one of these three components thus contributes to a religion's essential make-up.

What, however, is most important in any religious system is the personality and experience of the founder, and it is this central figure indeed that distinguishes one religion from another and constitutes the very life of that religion. Conceptually, the teaching may be regarded as most important, for it is in this that its followers believe, and regulate their lives accordingly.

Christians think they are Christians because they believe what Christ is recorded as having taught them in the Bible; this is what is in their consciousness. So with Buddhists; they think they are Buddhists because they accept Buddhist teachings. There is no doubt that Buddhism is quite different from Chris-

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tianity. For instance, Buddha does not teach a belief in God who is Creator of the world and judge of human things good and evil. Christianity does not teach that our life is full of misery because we are ignorant of the Dharma, which is the law of causation. As far as terminology and methodology are concerned, Buddhism and Christianity seem to differ widely and perhaps fundamentally; but when we formulate a new approach to them there is no reason we cannot somehow reconcile the Christian concept of God and the Buddhist concept of karma and causation. To my mind, what constitutes the fundamental difference between Christianity and Buddhism is not conceptual or theological, but emotional, personal, and historical. That is to say, what fundamentally diverges Buddhism from Christianity is the personality and experience of Buddha, which are not those of Christ.

Christ is said to be a carpenter's son, Buddha to be heir to a kingly position. Both Christ and Buddha were about thirty years of age when they began to proclaim their new teachings; Christ died within a few years of his activity, whereas Buddha enjoyed nearly fifty years an active missionary career. Buddha had many converts in his life-time, while Christ had only a few. Christ died a most tragic death on the cross, Buddha's ending was a most peaceful one. Of all the contrasts of whatever nature we can think of between the two great religious teachers of the world, this is the greatest and most consequential, and in fact we can say that the strongest contrast we can see between Christ and Buddha is in the way they ended their lives. This has indelibly and conspicuously coloured the nature of their religions. Christianity is militant, aggressive, intolerant, and death-courting, whereas Buddhism is always quiet, undisturbed, tolerant, and peace-loving. This difference no doubt comes partly from personal differences in character between the two religious leaders: Christ was young, of the emotional type, and somewhat violently-disposed; Buddha was just contrary, of the intellectual type and matured in every way. Historical environment also had something to do with this, and then there is what may be called racial temperament. Both the Hindus and the Jews are highly religious people, but the Jews do not seem to be as peace-loving as the Hindus. However this may be, Buddha's life is thoroughly characterised by serenity, dignity, and to a great extent philosophical aloofness; while he is in possession of a most compassionate heart, it does not assert itself vehemently but works by way of persuasion. It is interesting to pursue this course of study in connection with

the development of a religion itself and of its contact with different races. But the thesis I wish to take up here is the personal career of Buddhism's founder, which led him to the proclamation of his new teaching against the traditionalism and institutionalism of the older ones.

2.

Buddha means the "enlightened one"; his family name is Śākya and his surname Gautama. The Śākya family belongs to the Kshatriya and was one of the ruling classes in the northern part of India. According to records, he was scheduled to succeed his father and become ruler of the district whose capital was Kapilavastu. His life was thus an easy one from the material point of view. He did not have to work for his daily bread as Jesus perhaps did. Everything was provided for him; he had all the comfort and enjoyment and refinement his wealth and aristocratic position allowed him.

He married while still young and had a child called Rāhula, who later became his disciple and led a homeless monkish life like his father. When Gautama was twenty-nine years old—according to another tradition, nineteen—he became quite dissatisfied with a life of ease and worldly career. His imaginative mind saw that much of life was sealed off from his own daily experiences as heir-apparent to his father-king. He knew that his was not real life and that there was much more in it that was of greater and deeper significance. He felt within him a strong urge to go out into a world of realities.

One night he quietly left his home, his family, and everything that made up his royal life; this was indeed a revolutionary procedure on the part of Gautama. He could not have come to this decision unless he had felt an urge strong and sincere enough to make him plunge into an unknown realm of existence.

In India religion and philosophy traditionally have meant the same thing; there has been no distinction made between the two, and there have been no philosophers in the sense we have them today. It is true that there was a class of professional priests who conducted religious rites or ceremonies. But these people were neither religious teachers in the true sense of the term nor philosophers; they were just "professionals" and no more. But philosophy as such meant not only a study but a discipline and a life. For the Hindus, to study philosophy meant to find the way to emancipation from the bondage of relati-

ty. Philosophy to them was not merely an intellectual training, but the pointing of the way to spiritual freedom. In this respect philosophy was religion to the Hindus. What was discovered by philosophy did not remain as an abstraction but was directly applied to life, making it a living principle for our daily experiences.

Gautama was troubled with this life of relativity, which, as was customary in India, he conceived in terms of birth and death. His object in becoming a homeless monk was to attain liberation, to be liberated from the bondage of birth and death, which meant to gain eternal life. But the problem is: Is eternal life possible? Can we transcend this life of relativity? As long as we are individuals, we cannot escape the law that makes individuality possible. The law is that all individual beings are subject to birth and death; in other words, to escape birth and death is to cease to be an individual. So the question inevitably leads to a contradiction: to remain an individual and yet to rise above it, to be in the whirlpool of births and deaths and yet not to be drowned in it, to be on this side and at the same time to be on the other side. Gautama had to solve this dilemma.

3.

Gautama began his pursuit for liberation or emancipation (*moksha* in Sanskrit, *gedatsu* in Japanese) by visiting renowned hermit-philosophers in the forests of the Himalaya. They seem to have belonged to the Samkhya school which teaches a form of dualism, *purusha* and *prakriti*, of which the latter is the material principle that causes various forms of emotional disturbance in our consciousness. To realise the separation of *prakriti* from *purusha* was the aim of the philosophers belonging to this school, and for this purpose they recommended the practice of meditation. Some of the philosophers practised meditation simply because they wished to be born in the heavens, where they could have better forms of self-enjoyment than in this world.

Gautama was not satisfied with these views of life. His idea was to realise an absolute emancipation and to have along with it a logical basis for its philosophy. He aimed at a consistent intellectual solution of the problem of life, as well as at its experiential attainment. While he shunned philosophising

for its own sake, he was not averse to a consistent system of philosophy which would solve the problem of life along the line of the reasonableness of things. Religion may claim that experience or revelation is everything and the human intellect has nothing to do with it; but inasmuch as we human beings are endowed with the power of discrimination, this has to be made use of in one way or another. There is no doubt the intellect is ineffective in bringing about final enlightenment-experience, but it is, after all, the intellect that criticises itself and demonstrates where its weaknesses are, and then it is also the intellect that gives a coherent expression to the experience and makes the experience gain depth, clarity, and penetration. Gautama was cognisant of all this and detected certain flaws in the philosophy of the hermit-philosophers of his day; he also knew that asceticism done for the sake of merits to be gained in the succeeding life was far from real emancipation.

In the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, Buddha refutes the sixty-two schools of thought that were then flourishing, saying that they were based ultimately either on eternalism or on nihilism and not at all conducive to final emancipation. Here as in other places Buddha distinguishes between mere intellection (*ditṭhi*) and transcendental wisdom (*paññā*), showing that he was not against intellection as such but its application to a higher plane of thinking, where the *paññā* or *prajñā* form of intuition alone is available.

As Gautama was disappointed in the recluse-philosophers, he resolved to rely on his own method of attaining emancipation, for he was convinced that there was a way to it. He joined a group of ascetics.

India is the land par excellence of ascetics of all possible kinds. Even in this modern day there are still ascetics, known as sannyāsins, who practice many strange ways of physical torture, which they consider needed for spiritual liberation or welfare. Gautama's practice chiefly consisted in reducing his food intake. The idea was that when the body became weakened, the spirit would grow stronger and finally assert itself completely over the body. When this was kept up, his body became weaker and weaker; he grew so emaciated that he could no longer rise from his seat. He was now certainly facing death. He did not probably especially mind the prospect, except for the fact that he was still unable to solve the problem which made him start this kind of life in the first place. He now clearly saw the uselessness of continuing his self-mortification. The weakening of the flesh did not necessarily coincide with the unfolding

of the spiritual power, whatever this may mean. If he could not continue his meditation on the problem, he must now resort to another means for the successful execution of his final object. He must find a way to maintain a healthy body and at the same time to keep the mind alert so that he could go on with his meditation. He then decided to take nourishment, to restore his emaciated body into its former state of health.

According to the story, it is that Gautama was now in his sixth year since he began his life of a homeless monk in order to give a final solution to the problem which he set up for himself to solve. Six years of arduous thinking and austerity must mean a great deal to a mind like that of Gautama's; they must have prepared it by this time, bringing it to full maturity, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. The only thing that was needed to complete it was the experience of enlightenment, without which no emancipation is possible.

As far as the intellect was concerned, he must have seen by this time a certain light towards the way to emancipation, but as long as it was an intellectual solution, it was not enough; reality was still far away and could never be brought into his experience in this way.

Morally, he must have struggled hard to overcome all self-centred impulses, passions, emotions, and other annoying mental irritations. They are most annoying because they generally do not occupy the surface of consciousness; they suddenly, unexpectedly, assert themselves, coming up from nowhere. When we imagine we have subdued them they raise their heads in dreams, in which we see ourselves in total nakedness; every form of ugliness is mercilessly reflected there—and then how ashamed we feel! Gautama himself must have experienced all this. All his asceticism, I am sure, could not conquer his unconsciousness. The unconscious is the last citadel which beats back all our moral attack on it; before it yields itself, the whole personality must in a most desperate manner purge itself of every trace of selfishness.

Gautama's asceticism was in a way a vain attempt at final liberation, but in fact everything one does in all sincerity towards one's spiritual freedom is never to no purpose; it always decisively helps one to advance, to use Buddhist terminology, towards accumulating and maturing one's stock of merit. When Gautama decided to nourish his body after rising from his meditation, it was good time for him to try a new path to reach ultimate reality. Everything in him was conspiring towards the final stage of emancipation.

It is like painting a dragon, as the Chinese artists describe it: its whole body is finished; the scales, limbs, head, tail, horn, whiskers, and other details are all there. The dragon appears quite ready to fly through the clouds. What is now needed is the dotting of the eyes—this is the final task left for the painter, and a most important one. When this is not properly executed, the whole figure will lose its life, the dragon will be a dead one. This is the time for the painter, therefore, to throw himself body and soul into the dragon and become the dragon itself. Instead of his finishing the dragon's figure on the canvas as an outsider or as a mere painter, he must transform himself into the dragon, be thoroughly identified with the mythical animal. He is no more a painter now, he is the dragon itself—the dragon striving to create itself. When this identification reaches its last stage, the painter's brush moves by itself and dots the eyes. It is as if the dots grew out of the dragon's spirit, as if the mythical figure wakes after a long sleep—its eyes open by themselves, and its whole body now vibrates with life and spirit.

Gautama the dragon must have his eyes dotted; he is the painter and the dragon. The dotting must grow out of his personality, his inmost being. He has his philosophy, he has his moral discipline, and his health is returning; the only thing left for him is the awakening of the highest integrating principle.

As legend has it, he prepares his grass-seat under the Bodhi-tree by the river Nairañjana; he forces his mind not to rise from meditation until he has his enlightenment. He is now ready to grapple with his problem for the last time. If he could not attain, with all the necessary equipment fully completed, what he started out to attain six years ago when he left his worldly life, we would have to conclude that there is no hope for human beings to be emancipated from the shackle of birth and death and that we are forever doomed, to burn in eternal fire.

Seven days passed, it is said, before Gautama attained the highest enlightenment and became Buddha, the enlightened one. At the time, he happened to look at the morning star, and this was the occasion that made his mind open to a new, hitherto undreamed of realm of values. Something new suddenly dawned upon him and he was convinced that he was now the owner of the thing for which he had staked everything considered worthy in this world of relatively. I call this his enlightenment-experience.

In connection with this experience of enlightenment, there are two questions which will now engage our attention.

1. What is the *meditation* into which Buddha is said to have entered before enlightenment?
2. What is his *enlightenment-experience* whereby he is said to have released himself from the bondage of birth and death?

These are fundamental questions of Buddhism and when we understand what they are, we know what constitutes Buddhism and its development through its long history in India, in China, and in Japan.

The English term, "meditation," is used generally for the Sanskrit *dhyāna* (*jhāna* in Pali), but, strictly speaking, it is not a very happy one. English Buddhist translators sometimes have "trance" or "ecstasy" for it, which I think is worse than "meditation." For both "trance" and "ecstasy" suggest something abnormal, even pathological. They are too closely associated with emotionality, while "meditation" is rather intellectual as well as conative. Meditation is a kind of continued thinking or contemplation on some religious or philosophical subject, and in this respect it is no doubt a constituent of *dhyāna*; but *dhyāna* is more than that, for it is not mere thinking on some definite subject.

Dhyāna technique developed in India and is highly characteristic of Indian culture. It trains one's power of concentration that is needed in deep thinking. Deep concentrated thinking may lead the mind to something akin to trance or rapture, for consciousness then attains to a state of one-pointedness (*ekāgratā*). Buddhism distinguishes four stages of *dhyāna*: the first stage is having the mind detached from sensuous desires, from evil dispositions, from disquieting passions so that intellectual lucidity obtains. In the second stage, the mind is freed from intellection while a feeling of self-enjoyment prevails. By entering the third stage, there is a state of aloofness and a sense of serenity. The fourth and last stage of *dhyāna* transcends all this and there is an equanimity of utter purity.

Buddha is recorded as having gone through these stages before he attained the highest enlightenment (*sambodhi*), but to tell the truth, Buddha's enlightenment did not have very much to do with *dhyāna* itself, for the main idea that

made him take up his seat under the Bodhi-tree with the firm resolution not to rise from it again, was to give a final solution to the problem of life. *Dhyāna* might have induced his mind to a state of equanimity of utter purity, but equanimity is not the solution of the problem; however pure it might have been, it would not have been of any avail as regards awakening the mind to the highest enlightenment. In his day, there must have been many *dhyāna* adepts in India, but they were not enlightened ones; they failed to give satisfaction either to the quest of Gautama, the truth-seeker, or to the spiritual unrest of one who released himself from a highly alluring worldly environment. The problem that troubled Gautama's mind has its root in the depths of our being, and if it is to be solved the solution also must come from the same source, for when the problem is raised it is already solved at its base; the raising is solving. To seek the solution in *dhyāna* practice or in intellectual subtleties is going out of the problem itself. Gautama's *dhyāna* for seven days meant his realisation of the fact that all his six years' quest was, after all, to no purpose so long as he was wandering away from the right path. His *dhyāna* was to make him go back to the origin itself where his problem started; instead of trying to seek a solution of the problem outside itself, he now realised that the problem had to be attacked at its very source, that he had to see where the problem had its source, why it had such a persistent call upon him, and who its author was. As it would never yield to frontal attack, he decided to enter right into its heart and see how it worked itself out as a problem.

In other words, Gautama bent all his spiritual energy on discovering his Self, on finding if there were such an entity within his being. As long as he was on the relative plane, he felt the bondage of causation in the form of birth and death; could he not somehow go beyond this so that he could be in the realm of *amata*, no-death, where not the relative or empirical self but the the absolute or transcendental Self holds supreme reign? Intellection failed to reach here, self-mortification failed, and meditation, so called, was not of much help. He did not know what to do now; the only thing he was conscious of was the presence of the problem occupying the whole field of consciousness. The only thing he could do under the circumstances was to gaze at the problem and see what would come out of it. Of course he was not conscious of all this, but this was what he was doing all the time unconsciously. It was now imperative for him to take hold of the author of the problem, for this would

bring everything to a finish. Although he might not have had this procedure already outlined in his consciousness, there is no doubt this was what was going on in his mind.

Therefore, his meditation was not an ordinary kind of "meditation," "ecstasy," or "trance," or "musing"; there was in it an intense *conative* element interfused with a highly *noetic* element. There was something moving under the super-structure of his consciousness which was creative in the true sense of the term; a new land was about to be revealed on which this world on this side of the stream of *samsāra* is based and from which it derives its nourishment, its meaning, and all its mysteries. When the mind is in this so called psychological state of one-pointed-ness (*ekāgratā*), a kind of touch or pinch is needed to supply it with a channel of egress. This was given when Gautama happened to look at the morning star on the seventh morning of *dhyāna*. The sense of stimulation in itself has no meaning in regard to the revelation and significance of a new world except that it was an occasion for the revelation.

The new world of values thus revealed to him is the Self, the author of the problem with which, with every means he could command, he had been grappling for the past six years so strenuously. It was the Self who formulated the problem and presented it to his relative consciousness, for his intellectual cogitation. The intellect took it up at once, without much deliberation, as it does other problems. It is used to handling them in this fashion, failing to make a distinction between "the problem" par excellence and other problems usually seeking solution. The way the intellect generally copes with the problem of the self is to propose many secondary questions about it, such as:

Was I in ages past? . . . Was I not in ages past? . . . What was I then? . . . How was I then? . . . From what did I pass to what? . . . Shall I be in ages to come? . . . Shall I not be in ages to come? . . . What shall I then be? . . . How shall I then be? . . . From what shall I pass to what?
Am I? . . . Am I not? . . . What am I? . . . How am I? . . . Whence came my being? . . . Whither will it pass?¹

¹ *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, Tr. Lord Chalmers, Vol. I, "Sabb-āsava-sutta" (London: Humphrey Milford, 1926), p.5.

All these questions about "self" all come from the empirical point of view. The self here referred to is not the absolute or transcendental Self. The same term is used for both, but the meaning given here to self concerns the self which is subject to analysis and destined to be announced later as non-existent. The questions enumerated above are all of secondary importance. There is no direct attempt to take hold of the Self; they are *about* the self as an object of study or inspection. The self in question is made to stand against the inquirer, is set up outside him, faces him as something not belonging to him. For this reason, the self is always elusive to his grasp, slipping out of his hands; the harder he tries to catch it the more trickish it will prove. As long as this state of things continues, the problem will never be settled; it will forever remain as such. The Self, the author of the problem, is always at a distance; it is inviting us all the time, yet running away from us all the time. The Self is a great enchanter.

5.

We now come to the second question: What is the enlightenment-experience whereby Gautama became Buddha, the Enlightened One?

The contents of the enlightenment-experience are generally enumerated as the Four Noble Truths, the Eight Right Paths, and the Twelve Terms of Dependent Origination. This is the view of the early Buddhists. Buddha is said to have several times gone through the twelve terms of dependent origination while in *dhyāna*: forwards and backwards, round and back again. But this is evidently the work of later commentators who formulated the chain of dependence and incorporated it into the system of Buddhist teaching. If the enlightenment had anything to do with the formula of dependent origination, Buddha must be said to have used it as a springboard to the Beyond. The Beyond is where no causation avails, and the enlightenment takes place only in this causeless realm. No matter how many times a man may go through the twelve terms of causal dependence forwards and backwards, he will never get anywhere; he will simply be going round and round. An enlightenment is possible only when one is at once outside the chain and yet in it.

Buddha's problem from the very beginning was to get out of the chain of causation or dependence, from the bondage of birth and death, from the

fetters of transmigration. So he wanted to take hold of the first cause from which all things start. But as long as the first cause is a cause, it can never release him from the realm of relativity; he could not think of a causeless cause. This contradiction was what troubled him, but unless he transcended it somehow there was for him no way to emancipation, or enlightenment, or nirvana. The causal chain was by all means to be broken asunder.

The fourfold truth is also Buddha's attempt to transcend causation. It is apparently a formula of causation, but what was secretly, unconsciously, working in his mind was not just to present such a schematism, but to go beyond it. The formula is meant for ordinary minds that could never hope to achieve such an epistemological feat. Buddha's feat was not to be set on it. This is why Buddha was hesitant to proclaim his message right after he attained enlightenment:

Must I now preach what I so hardly won?
Men sunk in sin and lusts would find it hard to plumb this Doctrine
[Dharma],—up stream all the way,
abstruse, profound, most subtle, hard to grasp.
Dear lusts will blind them that they shall not see,
—in densest mists of ignorance befogged.²

Most people are indeed befogged in the densest mists of ignorance and delusion; that is to say, they do not really know how to go beyond the chain of causation, to break through the net of causal relativity and intellectual discrimination; they are unable, situated as they are amidst the whirlpools of birth and death, to survey the world with the eye of enlightenment. The fourfold truth is meant for such minds, as it came formulated by Buddha's great compassionate heart for all beings. As for Buddha himself, he is not in the fourfold truth, nor in the twelve terms of dependent origination. He thought of these things only in connection with his desire to save mankind from being bound to sense-desires, outgrown creeds, and meaningless asceticism. As far as Buddha himself while in *dhyāna* was concerned, his mind was not in the realm of intellectual discrimination.

² Ibid., "Ariya-parivesana-sutta," p. 118. Brackets are by D.T.S.

The Pali canon has "Renunciation, passionlessness, cessation, peace, discernment, enlightenment, and Nirvana"³ in reference to Buddha's quest for final reality. This has led many people to misinterpret the Buddhist teaching as advocating quietism, a gospel of tranquillisation, or even that of total self-negation. In the enlightenment attained by Buddha, however, there are no ideas suggestive of annihilation. All those ideas enumerated above are to be interpreted in the sense that the transcendental realm of *prajñā*-intuition does not permit terminology belonging to the sense-intellect world of reality.

That Buddha's enlightenment-experience had something quite positive is shown in what is known as the "hymn of victory," (*Dhammapada*, verse 153-4) and also in Buddha's answer to Upaka the mendicant (*ājīvika*) [verse 353], recorded in the *Majjhima Nikāya*. Let me quote the *Majjhima Nikāya*⁴ first:

All-vanquishing, all-knowing, lo! am I,
from all wrong thinking wholly purged and free.
All things discarded, cravings rooted out,
—whom should I follow?—I have found out all.
No teacher's mine, no equal. Counterpart
to me there's none throughout the whole wide world.
Arahat am I, teacher supreme,
utter Enlightenment is mine alone;
unfever'd calm is mine, Nirvāna's peace.

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Dhammapada, 353:⁵

All have I overcome, all do I know;
From all am I detached, all have I renounced;
Wholly absorbed am I on the "Destruction of Craving" (*Arahantship*);
Having comprehended all by myself whom shall I call my teacher?

³ Ibid., p.117.

⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

⁵ *The Dhammapada*, tr. Nārada Thera (Colombo, 1946), p. 58. For the third line, Dr. Suzuki's ms reads: Wholly absorbed am I on the destruction of craving (*tanhakkhaye*).

Dhammapada, 179:⁶

Whose conquest (of passion) is not turned into defeat, no conquered (passion) of his in this world follows him,—trackless Buddha of infinite range, by what way will you lead?

In this verse what is to be noted is: trackless—*apadam*, of infinite range—*anantagocaram*. The idea of *anantagocaram* is explained in verse 385:⁷

For whom there exists neither the hither nor the farther shore, nor both the hither and the farther shore, he who is undistressed and unbound,—him I call a Brahmana.

Are these not the most unqualifiedly definite pronouncements that could be given out by any seer or mystic? Buddha's state of mind at the time must be compared to that of the almighty God who declared, seeing the light he commanded to be, "That is good!" There is absolutely no touch of passivity in it, nor inane laissez-faireism, nor anything to remind us of a world-conqueror or a power-thirsty autocrat, on the plane of relativity. Buddha shows here no vain elation, no arrogant self-assertiveness; he just declares his position with naive simplicity, yet with undisputable authority. He refers to the calm and peace of "nirvana which knows neither birth nor decay, neither disease nor death, neither sorrow nor impurity"; and that this calm, this peace, this deathlessness is not a mere static state of absolute quiescence or nothingness is certified by the passage preceding this. His conquest goes along with his knowledge and enlightenment and freedom from "wrong thinking" as well as "cravings." All this most emphatically demonstrates that Buddha was conscious of something which transcends our ordinary way of thinking and feeling, but which is not identical with a negative state of absence of anything. He was aware of something definitely positive and dynamic in which a conative element is interfused with a noetic element. The conative element translates itself into the sense of conquest in the field of ordinary consciousness, and the noetic element as knowledge—more exactly, as self-awareness or self-consciousness. When Buddha's enlightenment-experience is thus analysed, his royal pronouncement becomes intelligible and we are also enabled to understand why it is the basis of all Buddhist teachings.

⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

In these gatha, however, the content of enlightenment is not sufficiently elucidated, and in this respect the “hymn of victory” gives us better information. Here is Albert J. Edmunds’ version:⁸

May a life to transmigrate,
Long quest, no rest, hath been my fate,
Tent-designer inquisitive for:
Painful birth from state to state.

Tent-designer! I know thee now;
Never again to build art thou:
Quite out are all thy joyful fires,
Rafter broken and roof-tree gone;
Into the Vast my heart goes on,
Gains Eternity—dead desires.

[The original in Pali:]

Anekajātisaṃsāraṃ sandhāvissaṃ anibbisāṃ,
Gahakārakaṃ gavesanto, dukkhā jāti punappunaṃ. (153)

Gahakāraka! diṭṭho’si, puna gehaṃ na kāhasi,
Sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā, gahakūṭaṃ viṣaṅkhitāṃ,
Viṣaṅkhāragataṃ cittaṃ taṇhāṇaṃ khayam ajjhagā. (154)

There are two things we must notice in this hymn: one is “tent-designer” (*gahakāraka*), and the other, “gone into the Vast” (*viṣaṅkhāragataṃ*). Edmunds’ translation is not literal, as he says: “I have departed from my usual method and given a freer rendering, so as to convey some remote echo of the melody of the Pali.”

Viṣaṅkhāra, for which he has “the vast,” literally means “*saṅkhāra*-dissolved,” *saṅkhāra* being a Buddhist technical term frequently used synonymously with *dharmā* or *dhamma*, in the sense of “an object” or “a thing.” *Saṅkhāra* is in fact a difficult term for which to find an equivalent in any language. I will not enter

⁸ *Hymns of the Faith (Dhammapada)*, tr. Albert J. Edmunds (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1902), p. 37.

here into a discussion of it. Let us take it as meaning "all the things of this world physically or mentally conditioned." *Visaṅkhāragatam* therefore will mean "free from all worldly conditions," not in a strict metaphysical sense, but loosely or popularly understood.

For *visaṅkhāragatam*, Dr. Pereira has "mind attains the Unconditioned"; Nārada Thera has "to dissolution (Nibbāna) goes my mind"; while Professor Lanman has "my heart, demolished too, I ween." There will be as many translations for this phrase as there are translators of it, and each of them may be justifiable in its way. But I am inclined to interpret the phrase more after Edmunds and Pereira than after Lanman, for Buddha means here that his mind has transcended the realm of conditionality and reached where there is no opposition of subject and object, of mind and matter, and therefore that his enlightenment-experience has released his mind from the fetters of birth and death, decay and disease, sorrow and impurity, which are *saṃsāra*; that is, that he has put an end to his noble quest (*āriya-parivesana*) for which he had left his home spending six long arduous years of intellection and austerity.

Visaṅkhāragatam cittaṃ does not mean that his mind or heart has been demolished or dissolved as his "house" has. That which has been demolished, together with the "house" with its rafters and ridge-pole, is his relative mind, his empirical self, for the "house" is this mind or self and decidedly not the absolute mind or transcendental Self (*citta*). The absolute mind or Self is that which has attained the Unconditioned or gone into the Vast and gained Eternity—and this is no other than the enlightenment-experience. The *citta* was hitherto found subject to conditions (*saṅkhāra*); it is now emancipated from them, *visaṅkhāragatam*. The *citta*, the absolute mind, transcendental Self, being freed from conditions, attains its original purity and mastership and passionlessness (*taṇhānaṃ khayaṃ*—thirst-destroyed).

The question will naturally be raised here as to the relation that obtains between the relative mind and the absolute mind, between ordinary consciousness and that which transcends it, between the empirical self and the transcendental Self. Before taking up this question, let us see what is meant by "house-builder" or "tent-designer" (*gahakāraka*).

The house-builder is evidently the one who caused the author of these lines (*pada*) to go through many a rebirth and made his repeated births wearisome and full of sorrows. The author, who is the one who has now succeeded in

discovering the builder, declares that the builder is no longer going to build another house for him—and by a house the author means this corporeal existence. Now the questions are: Who is this house-builder? Why was it necessary for the author to discover him? How does this discovery lead to the cessation of repeated birth? The builder is not killed or destroyed (*khaya*); he is just seen (*ditṭha*). Is the seeing enough to make the builder stop his work? Is the seer quite sure of the builder's not building again? Where is the builder? Is the builder outside the seer? If the builder is outside the seer, that is, if the two are not identical, how can the seer exercise his authority over the outsider? If the seer is in possession of this authority, how did he get it? In what relationship does the one stand to the other? What relationship is there between the seeing and the checking?

Another series of questions runs like this: Who is this seer—the one who has seen the builder? Why does he just want to see the builder instead of destroying the builder himself? Why is the seeing enough? Why no utter destroying of the builder? Is not destruction more effective to stop a cycle of births and deaths than mere discovering? Could it be that the seer cannot destroy the builder? Is not the seer himself the builder? If the seer destroys the builder, may this not mean the seer destroying himself? The seer does not wish himself to be destroyed, only wanting to check his subjection to rebirths? How can the seer be the builder if the two are not to be identified? How does the seeing make the seer go into the Vast, attain Eternity? How is the seeing such an effective agent as to bring the *sankhāra* to dissolution, as to put an end to *taṇhā* (thirst)? How is the seer the victor when he does not destroy the builder? Victory is generally associated with the total annihilation of the enemy—in the present case that of the builder. The latter is apparently still abroad, but being seen, is he ashamed of coming out again? Is the seeing so thorough that the builder finds no place to hide himself and continue the nefarious work of causing the seer to be reborn? Is repeated birth so undesirable? Is it not due to the fact of rebirth that nirvana is desirable? If there were no rebirth, there would be no nirvana, which is full of bliss. Is not nirvana then conditioned by rebirth? Is not the seeing the outcome of the desire to see, which is a kind of *taṇhā* (thirst)? Is not the seeing interlocked with the building? Is not the building the seeing, and the seeing the building? Is not the seer the builder and the builder the seer?

When we carefully follow up all these questions, do we not come finally to the conclusion that the builder and the seer and the author are one and the same personality and that *tanhā* is nirvana and nirvana *tanhā*?

What made the seer wish to see the builder was *tanhā* itself, while it was *tanhā* that made the seer go through many a birth. This means that *tanhā* is the seer and the builder. But this identification was impossible before the seer had yet no experience of seeing, that is, no enlightenment-experience. Buddha was able to breathe forth this "hymn of victory" only because of his enlightenment-experience.

We can now read the "hymn of victory" constructively rather than analytically, so that we can see to what extent Buddha's enlightenment contributes towards the building up of Buddhist teachings. Not only the primitive Buddhists derived their inspiration from it, but, especially, the later Buddhists developed from it their various schools of what is known as Mahayana. Human existence, as it is finite and limited and subject to the law of causation, cannot escape birth and death. Birth and death has nothing evil in it, but as soon as there is an individual being who tries to assert himself and finds himself blocked on all sides, he feels frustrated, which worries him and makes him miserable. This leads him to reflect upon himself and also upon the conditions under which he keeps up his existence. The reflection is not wholly intellectual; it contains something moral in the sense that the subject has the feeling something is not quite right with him. He entertains a kind of doubt as to there being something wrong with himself. He wishes to see what this wrong is.

Now, this seeing is the privilege granted to human consciousness only. The seeing cannot alter the course of things; birth and death goes on in spite of our seeing into it, for the seeing is the outcome of birth and death; but at the same time it transcends its conditions. That is why the seeing puts a stop to the recurrence of birth and death. The seeing is not just a seeing into birth and death with the seer standing outside it; the seeing is birth and death seeing itself. There is no seer who keeps himself outside the cycle; the seer is the cycle-maker. The seer who recognises the tabernacle of birth and death is its builder; the builder who is imagined to be constructing it for the seer is really the seer himself, which means the builder or actor is the seer, and the seer is the actor. Except that when this identification takes place the house-builder goes on building and yet there is no more building. There is a cycle of birth and death

which cannot be stopped as long as the builder is alive—and the builder can never be put to death—and in this sense the builder is the seer gone into the Vast, attaining Eternity, according to Edmunds' interpretation.

To make this complexity more easily comprehensible, I suggest the following: What a man generally calls his "self" is the empirical ego conceptually postulated, and there is no objective entity corresponding to it. The empirical ego is nothing but a name and in actuality consists of feelings, perceptions, images, etc. The reason we think there must be something holding all things together, in the same way as my table has form, colour, weight, and other properties, is due to our old way of interpreting the objective world. The Buddhists have analysed the soul (*ātman*) and found nothing there except a bundle of impressions (*vedanā*), thoughts (*saṃjñā*), disposition to act (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*). Their favourite way of arguing for the non-existence of a soul is analytical and analogical. They point to a wheel or a house and state that when a wheel or house is dissected into its component parts there is no wheel, no house whatever. An object is divisible into infinitely small parts, and nobody can discover anything in them which can be called its substance, corresponding to the name the object bears. All things of whatever form are composites; they are analysable and finally reducible to nothingness. This applies to all objects, mental as well as physical. Hence the Buddhist doctrine of non-ego (*anattā*) and of impermanence of things. Because they come into existence owing to the combination of causes and conditions (*hetupratyaya*), they are inevitably subject to final dissolution, and anything that finally dissolves cannot have an ego. This idea of egolessness of things is supported by modern science and philosophy. Everything is in a constant flow, all things are becoming, and there is nothing in this world of relativity that will retain its substantiality forever. Change implies impermanency and egolessness—the idea which later developed in Buddhism into that of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

In Buddhist terminology, a constant becoming means a cycle of birth and death. Buddha wanted to escape this; that is, he wished to go beyond the empirical ego, to see if there were not something in himself which supported the constant flow of thoughts, eternally subject to becoming. Just to declare the egolessness of things, the relativity or emptiness of ego-consciousness, did not satisfy him. He felt something in him which urged him to reach out to the absolute, to a transcendental ego; for it was not enough, even from the

purely dialectic point of view, just to state the doctrine of becoming or relativity and to stop there as if this were final, giving the soul a satisfactory rest. There must be a kind of frame in which relativity becomes conceivable; a cycle of becoming must be set up within a frame; there must be something which supplies a background or a field to the becoming or relativity. The frame or background or field where the play of birth and death is enacted may not be something existing outside the play itself. The concept of time must somehow be complemented by that of space. Spatialisation may lead to eternal quiescence, absolute passivity, inane passionlessness; whereas temporalisation is apt to unsettle the orderliness of all things, to upset the well-balanced equilibrium of the cosmic system, to take away the sense of rest and eternity from the soul without giving anything in its place. The human soul, whatever it may mean, demands something to rest itself upon; becoming must somehow be supported by being. Acting alone is not conducive to peace; it must have the actor, the unmoved mover, and not necessarily behind it or outside it. Becoming and being must be identified, action must be the actor himself. The empirical ego must have its support in the transcendental ego. The empirical ego must set up its frame of action within the one that at once transcends and contains it. Transcendence must not exclude immanence; immanence and transcendence must go together in such a way as to make the two ideas mutually distinguishable and yet interlockingly fused in each other. There must be such an ego working through the empirical ego. Otherwise, we cannot account for the deep and ineffable sense we have of something stabilising, something absolutely untouched by relativity, something altogether above becoming. This is "the builder of the tabernacle" (*gahakāraka*).

But, we must repeat, the transcendental ego is not something outside the empirical ego, standing in opposition to it and working over it. The one is in the other in such a way that the two are distinguishable and yet undistinguishable. To see into this apparent illogical-ness is to experience the supreme enlightenment. The builder is seen and not destroyed. If he were destroyed there would be a total annihilation of all things—which has no sense whatever, as in the case of absolute scepticism.

We read in the *Dhammapada* (verse 49): "As a bee, without harming the flower, its colour, or scent, flies away, collecting only the honey, ever so

should the sage wander in the village.”⁹ The collecting the honey means seeing into the way in which the empirical ego with all its conditionality and emptiness holds in itself something of the transcendental ego, whereby, retaining its relative objectivity, it is able to transcend itself. The empirical ego is not annihilated; it goes on with all its activities; its colour, scent, and form are all there. But its honey, which is the essence of the flower, is gathered by the transcendental ego, which transforms the whole flower into something far more than it used to be. When we say honey it may sound too material; but when we make it represent what makes the flower what it is—I mean its beauty—and when we know how to appreciate it, we get from the flower all there is in it as its suchness (*tathātva*). The suchness of the flower is its value, its meaning, its truth, its totality.

The wise man knows how to appreciate all these things, not only in the flower but in the life he lives. He is not different in all his ways of living from ordinary people; yet his inner life is of “infinite range” (*agocara*), and there is no path (*apada*) leading to his abode, for he has really no abode (*apratistha*). He is now the one “whose conquest is not conquered again, into whose conquest no one in this world enters”¹⁰ (verse, 179). He has his craving (*taṇhā*), which, however, has “no snares, no poisons.” His cravings have now turned into a compassionate heart (*karuṇā*)—the desire to save all his fellow-beings. For he is the awakened one (*buddha*), he has cut the strap, the thong, the rope, the appendages, the cross-bar (verse 398), by which beings are generally found tied to the empirical ego. The ego is there as it used to be, but it has lost its string; it is like the lotus-leaf which sheds all dew-drops, like the point of a needle from which a mustard seed falls. “The builder of the tabernacle” retains his seat in his old place, but he has severed its connection with lust and hatred, pride and envy. The life-course (*gati*) of such a one is beyond the scrutiny of the gods and men.

In Buddhist psychology, the scholars assume the existence of *manas* at the back of the six *viññānas*; through these *viññānas*, *manas* takes in an objective world, including what is supposed to be going on in our relative consciousness,

⁹ Nārada Thera, p. 9.

¹⁰ *The Dhammapada*, tr. S. Radhakrishnan (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 119.

and synthesises all the impressions thus collected as belonging to the self. *Manas* itself is not the self; it gains the idea of self from what is imagined to be lying behind it, which is called the *ālaya*. The *ālaya* is unconscious of itself. But it becomes conscious when it goes out of itself mediated by *manas*. *Manas* thinks this self-manifestation of the *ālaya* is *manas*' own operation, and by this *manas* deceives itself to be the real ego, whereas, as a matter of fact, *manas* is helpless without the backing of the *ālaya*. The synthesising power really comes from the *ālaya*, which supplies *manas* with a frame wherein the latter operates. Without this frame *manas* knows no way to integrate all its activities.

The *ālaya* may thus be conceived as corresponding to the transcendental ego and *manas* to the empirical ego. What is denied by the earlier Buddhists is the empirical ego; the doctrine of non-ego (*anattā*) is thereby established. The ego that is later revived, for instance, in the *Nirvana Sutra* is not the empirical ego but the transcendental one. In fact it is the discovery of this ego that constitutes the Mahayana teaching as distinguished from the Hinayana. The Hinayana refuses to acknowledge the atman (*attā*) in any sense, without realising that when nirvana is characterised in the *Nirvana Sutra* as having these four qualities: eternity, bliss, freedom, and purity, the Hinayana scholars understand freedom or self-mastery, which in my term is *ātman* here, in the sense of the empirical ego; but in the Mahayana the term *ātman* is used not in its relative meaning but in the sense of absolute freedom, absolute independence, being the master of itself, etc. These characteristics are denied to the empirical ego, for it is subject to conditions, has no self-masterfulness, cannot be its own master. The doctrine of *anatta* (non-ego), therefore, means that the empirical ego is a relative existence, always ready for disintegration, and that it is not to be relied upon as something eternal and sustaining everything transitory and sorrow-breeding. The early Buddhists have not been able to go any deeper than that. They stopped at the empirical ego, they did not know how to transcend it, they failed to see into the background of relativity and empirical consciousness. The Mahayana *ātman* is not to be confused with the Hinayana *attā*. The idea of ego assumed by *manas* is in the sense of the Hinayana *attā* and consequently has no reality. The real ego-idea is supplied by the *ālaya*, which is behind *manas* and constantly energises it. But the *ālaya* is not the ego-substance, nor is it the principle of individuation. While individual objects and ideas find their reason of existence in the *ālaya*, the *ālaya* itself transcends them.

The enlightenment-experience takes place when the empirical ego realises, on the one hand, that as long as it remains in itself it has no self-substance, no free authority, no creativity in it, and on the other hand, that all that it thought belonged to it has come from somewhere else, from something altogether beyond its discriminative comprehension. This new orientation on the part of the empirical ego is known as *paravṛitti*, "turning about at the basis," which is a kind of mental revolution, or religiously speaking, revelation. The ego, accustomed to a world-view based on discrimination or intellectual analysis, here loses itself altogether in a maze designed itself, and when, thus not knowing how to extricate itself, it sinks into the utmost state of dejection and despair, a light unexpectedly, abruptly, passes through it, and it knows what it is, where it comes from, and why it is such as it is. This realisation releases the ego from all entanglements. That is to say, the entanglements are all there, but it is not at all troubled with them now, for as far as the ego, enlightened, is concerned, they have lost their former hold on it. It now walks its own way, it is free, gone into the Vast which has no circumference and therefore no centre, that is, with a centre everywhere. The individual, empirical ego has dissolved itself into the super-ego, the transcendental ego.

The transcendental ego is super-individual, above the conceptual realm of differentiation, and yet it is not a logical postulate. When it asserts itself in the ego-consciousness, it is real, concrete, and personal. The individual who experiences it feels its living actuality and not merely conceptually. From this we see that the transcendental ego is not the product of intellection; it is the will in its highest and most fundamental sense. Because it is the will it is the person, it is the "builder of the house."

When Buddha declares, "*gabakāraka, diṭṭho'si!*"¹¹ we are apt to take this *gabakāraka* for a mischief-maker; and when he further asserts "you shall build no more again," we assume that the mischief-maker is now taken captive and under control so as not to cause the wheel of birth and death to revolve again. But this is not the case, not our experience. In point of fact, the builder has two aspects, walks in two directions, and, according to which way we take him, he is either a mischief-maker or a value-creator. When he is identified

¹¹ "O house-builder! you are seen."

with the empirical ego, which is the principle of individuation and at the same time the source of all sorts of craving and attachment, he snares us into every form of complexity and bewilderment. But when he is understood and seen on the higher plane of thought and in the direction of transcendental consciousness or consciousness general, he is the will, the creator of values.

"Repeated birth is sorrowful"—this is at once true and not true; it all depends on how we take it. When we know what a cycle of births and deaths means, the cycle is the source of joy and happiness; it is because of birth and death that we are able to attain enlightenment and appreciate the bliss of nirvana. Nirvana is not something that is left behind when birth and death is done away with. Nirvana and birth and death are conceptually opposed and irreconcilable; experientially, indeed, nirvana is birth and death, birth and death is nirvana. But our empirical ego fails to realise it and we misuse this life of birth-and-death for the pursuance of our egotistic impulses and ambitions; it affords a constant opportunity for suffering and worry and grief. Life turns into hell, birth-and-death becomes the most undesirable event, and it is then that we must try to escape it by all means.

To my mind, therefore, the "hymn of victory" is to be given an interpretation altogether different from what has hitherto been given by the earlier Buddhists. They have not been thorough enough, deep enough in entering into Buddha's enlightenment-experience. They have always tended to be negative and analytical, forgetting to interpret Buddha's own life in connection with his teaching.

We may observe these facts in relation to birth-and-death: Why should we be sorry to be involved in a cycle of births and deaths, to be on this side of existence, to be living with other beings, with cats, dogs, frogs, and butterflies, with snows and thunder, with trees and flowers, with seas and lakes, with mountains and woods? It all depends on how we react to them. Take, for instance, the plants. Is it not charming to see the flowers bloom? Is it not wonderful to observe how infinitely varied they are in colour, form, size, structure, etc., according to climate, soil, altitude, and meteorological conditions? The sciences may be prosaic enough in some respects, but the study itself is immensely absorbing and brings us to the understanding of Nature with her inexhaustible creativity. Is not Nature herself a reflection of our inner life? Beauty may be transient: the morning glory may not last more than a few hours of

the morning sun, but while lasting, how heavenly glorious it is! A young maiden is entrancingly beautiful, her form may be a matter of less than a decade but we cannot gainsay her attractiveness while it is there. To lament its decaying is intellectual abstraction and perversion; momentarism is really a much sounder attitude. Let us accept and admire all beautiful things. There is no need to go beyond that. Memory, anticipation, and discrimination warp our right seeing (*samyagdṛṣṭi*) and consequently our right apprehension (*samyag-saṃkalpa*). To react properly, spontaneously, naturally, in the way of suchness (*yathābbūtaṃ*), means to be living on this side of birth-and-death as reflecting or mirroring the Beyond, the Land of Purity, as is told in the *Sukhāvati-vyūha Sūtra*.

Beauty may be skin-deep, but it is there, and we need not bother ourselves about its depth. Rennyo Shōnin's epistle on "the pink-coloured face in the morning and a mass of white bones in the evening" is a perverted view of reality. Man is supposed to be a rational being, but his ratiocination does not go very far and makes him quite frequently a willing subject of self-deception and superficiality. His rationality is "skin-deep," whereas his appreciation of the beautiful really comes out of a far deeper source only when he knows it. When Chōsha (Ch'ang-sha), a great Zen master of the Five Dynasties period, was asked where he had been around, he answered: "First, I went out across the field of young spring grass, and came back stepping over a path of fallen flowers." Is this not a far healthier attitude of mentality than meditating on the nine or ten subjects of impurity (*asubbāva*)? Buddhists generally, especially the earlier ones, have spent too much time on such subjects as impermanency, impurity, and defilement. Instead of this, why not try to appreciate things beautiful which have really a deeper value than so-called truths? This is meant by "collecting the honey without injuring the colour and scent of the flower."