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A NOTE ON OPENNESS

The sudden entry into general circulation of a familiar term with a new ambience of meaning often has a significance that goes beyond mere philological curiosity. Since language is molded by thought at a level prior to and more basic than that of deliberate design, such changes in linguistic currency may well signal deeper changes taking place in the mental make-up of those who use the term. They can be seen as barometric indicators of transformations in the sphere of consciousness—in our patterns of thinking, in our attitudes, in our goals.

If there is one term that might be chosen to characterize the intellectual and moral climate of the present day, it would be the word "openness.` This seemingly colourless word has come to mark the fulfillment of the centuries-long struggle against the oppressive weight of established tradition in so many diverse departments of human concern. Its three syllables are a hymn of victory for the triumph of the empirical method over formulated dogma as the key to knowledge, for the primacy of individual conscience over prescribed morality in the domain of ethics, and in our private lives; for the replacement of the reign of the superego by a new-found liberty to explore the subterranean channels of impulse and desire in whatever direction they might lead. Perhaps most importantly, the notion of openness also points to a particular attitude towards experience, an attitude which has quietly permeated our culture so thoroughly that it now seems almost an innate human disposition. Briefly, this attitude might be -described as a soft and affable affirmation of experience in its totality, coupled with a pliant receptivity to its full range of forms. This attitude, it must be stressed, only rarely solidifies into a consciously held conviction; more typically it lingers in the background of the mind as an unverbalized intuition, a fluid and shifting orientation towards the world. Historically rooted in the widespread decline of belief structures centred upon a transcendent goal of human life and an objectively grounded scale of values, the philosophy of openness takes all truth to be relative, all values personal and subjective. Thus it holds that our task in life is to open ourselves as fully as we can to the unfolding miracle of existence and to celebrate its Infinite possibilities. The spread of this attitude through the general culture has left its stamp on current interpretations of Buddhism as well. We thus find that for many of today's Buddhist teachers the Dhamma is essentially a method for arriving at the consummation of all that the notion of openness implies. From this perspective Buddhism is not a doctrine with its own distinct body of tenets, not a discipline guiding us to a supramundane goal, but a tool for opening to the here and now. The most basic flaw at the bottom of human suffering, it is hold, is our tendency to dose ourselves off from experience, to lock ourselves with our concepts and judgements into a limited compartment of reality. By developing through. meditation a non-discriminating "choiceless" awareness which allows

whatever arises to hold its ground, we are enabled to break through our constraints and merge with the stream of events, to dance with the "ten thousand things =accepting them all yet without dinging to them.

While the advocates of openness are usually adroit in assimilating their principles to the classical Dhamma, a careful examination would reveal gaping differences between the two. Here 1 want to focus only on some crucial differences in their respective orientations towards experience. It should be noted at once that whereas the school of openness bids us to drop our discriminations, judgements and restraints in order to immerse ourselves in the dynamic flow of immediate experience, the Buddha prescribes an attitude towards experience that arises from carefully wrought judgements, employs precise discriminations, and issues in detachment and restraint. This attitude, the classical Buddhist counterfoil to the modern program of openness, might be summed up by one word found everywhere in the ancient texts. That word is heedfulness (appamāda).

Heedfulness denotes an attitude of critical scrutiny directed towards one's own mind both in its internal movement and in its reactions to external affairs. The term suggests diligent effort and acute attentiveness, and it further sounds a note of moral caution and care. It thus implies, as the Buddha intended it to imply, that we are constantly exposed to danger—a danger bom from within that becomes ever more imminent to the degree that we allow heedfulness to slip and we slide into its opposite: into heedlessness or negligence (pamāda).

Such caution is necessary because deeds have consequences that extend beyond themselves. Whereas the school of openness tends to subordinate concern with the consequential aspect of action to a stress on abiding in the present moment, the classical Dhamma taught by the Buddha asks us to recognize that all willed actions, even our fleeting thoughts and impulses, are seeds with roots buried deep in the mind's beginningless past and with the potency to generate results in the distant horizons of the future. These long-range consequences of action are of enormous importance to us; for however far they might he from our vision now, when the time comes for our deeds to ripen, it is we ourselves who must experience their fruits. As these fruits are invariably determined by the moral quality of our actions, diligent self-examination—that is, heedfulness—is urgently needed so that we may restrain ourselves from those deeds that seem pleasant but bear painful results, and so that we may apply ourselves to those deeds that may be difficult but yield long-term benefits.

The mode of thinking based on openness rejects duality as a product of discrimination and deluded concepts. ft tacitly presupposes that existence as such is ultimately benign; that beyond our deluded concepts, the rich and vivid diversity of forms has a single taste, a taste that is sweet. In contrast, the attitude of heedfulness is grounded upon the view that existence is textured through and through by dualities that are profound and inescapably real. The world bears testimony to this vision in the contrast between the charming, delightful surfaces of things and their underlying hollowness and inadequacy; our minds bear testimony in the ongoing contest between the wholesome mental factors and the unwholesome ones, between the upward urge for purification and the downward pull of the defllements. That this duality is not trivial is seen by the consequences: the one leads to Nibbana, the state of deliverance, the Deathless, while the other leads back into the round of repeated birth, samsāra, which is also the realm of Mara, the Lord of Death.

To practise heedfulness is to take full account of these dualities with their profound implications. The heedful person does not aim at a choiceless awareness open to existence in its totality, for to open oneself thus is to risk making oneself vulnerable to just those elements in oneself that keep one bound to the realm of Mara. The awareness developed through heedfulness is built upon a choice a well-considered choice to abandon those qualities one understands to be detrimental and to develop in their place those qualities one understands to be beneficial, the states that lead to purity and peace.

Both in our outer involvements in the world and in the mind's internal procession of thought, imagination and emotion, there continually spreads before us a forked road. One branch of this fork beckons with the promise of pleasure and satisfaction but in the end leads to pain and bondage; the other, steep and difficult to climb, leads upward to enlightenment and liberation. To discard discrimination and judgement for an easy-going openness to the world is to blur the important distinction between these two quite different paths. To be heedful is to be aware of the dichotomy, and to strive to avoid the one and pursue the other. As the Buddha reminds us, heedfulness is the path to the Deathless, heedlessness is the path of Death.

Bhlkkhu Bodhi

EXPLORING THE WHEELS

Gods and the Universe In Buddhist Perspective: Essays on Buddhist Cosmology. Francis Story (Wheel No. 180/181). Gods and their Place in Buddhism; Cosmological Thought in Buddhism and Modem Science; Expanding Universe and Steady-State Universe; Buddhism and the Origin of Life; Is There a Beginning?; and Magic Mountain.

In the past few years, at the levels of both subatomic physics and astrophysics, science has made discoveries which bear remarkable parallels to Buddhist cosmology. Several books have been published in the West which examine modem scientific theories and the Buddhist teachings on the multiplicity of world-systems, on the evolution and devolution of universes, on the ultimate voidness of matter, on transcendental spacelessness and timelessness, and on systems theory. Years ago Francis Story had already anticipated these parallels, as the present Wheel demonstrates:

It is a striking fact that the true picture of the solar system as we now have it, is actually in closer conformity with the Buddha's teaching of universal principles than is the traditional one held by the Buddhist commentators. It carried out the principle of uninterrupted revolution denoted by the wheel and that of having no point of commencement, of which the physical symbol is the sphere. If, in fact, we would seek for a material illustration of the law of recurrence, of cyclic progression under the domination of incessant change, we should find its perfect expression in the revolving island-universes, the solar systems and the structure of the atom.

While these correspondences between modem scientific thought and Buddhism are important, the differences, too, need to be examined. Science searches for the beginning of the universe; Buddhism teaches that samsara is beginningless. Science is concerned with matter; Buddhism with interrelationships. Science seeks for causes and effects; Buddhism propounds dependent arisings due to specific conditions.

Causation is important to both modern science and Buddhism. However, causal law in Buddhism goes further than does causation in science:

It is just in this transcendental concept of the causal law that Buddhism establishes the moral principle of Kamma. The materialist rejects the idea of God and Soul; and because he sees no evidence of a spiritual or other purpose in life, he rejects all belief in the moral order of the universe as well. Buddhism also is independent of a theistic creator and of a soul or ego-principle, but Buddhism maintains the validity of the moral law. Buddhism admits the infinite multiplicity of worlds and the apparent insignificance of man—yet man is the most significant of all beings, according to Buddhism; man is of more significance than the gods. Why is this? Because the gods are merely enjoying temporarily the results of good actions in the past, but man is the master of his own destiny—on the battlefield of his own mind he can conquer the ten thousand world-systems and put an end to Samsara, just as did the Buddha. But to do this he must understand the nature of Kamma, the principal that governs his internal and external world.

Buddhism stresses moral order. It analyzes not just the consciousness operating in the mundane world, or even the ability to achieve altered states of consciousness, but presents a continuum of hierarchical existences in the "three worlds" *(tiloka):* the realm of sense desire, the fine-material realm, and the world of formlessness, the thirty-one levels at which sentient beings take rebirth according to kamma.

In examining these points, Francis Story presents exactly what the Buddha did teach: what he retained as valid from the scientific ideas of his day, what he presented differently, and most important: why the Buddha taught not a comprehensive system of cosmology, but only those aspects which were of importance because an understanding of them could lead to the way of liberation from conditioned existence.

The Buddha's teaching was concerned with suffering, its cause and its eradication; it was, as He often emphasized, a pointer to the way of release from conditioned existence and was not to be entangled in any of the conflicting views that originate in man's misinterpretation of phenomena. The Buddha himself did not erect any cosmological system, but only stipulated that any concepts that were held should be in conformity with the general principles of causality.

We can certainly expect that the science of tomorrow will continue to learn new facts, and to create new theories. Whether these new ideas will reveal even more similarities or not remains to be seen. But the material in *Gods and the* Universe in *Buddhist* Perspective will not change, for these are the teachings of the Buddha—the Teacher of gods and men.

Ayya Nyanasirī

PAST AND FUTURE

The year 1990 brought a return of peace and stability to the southern and central provinces of Sri Lanka, and life here resumed its regular routines, unhampered by the disruptions, stoppages and violence of the previous year, with its attendant anxiety and distress. This change enabled our staff to put in their full work week, and also resulted in an increased flow of visitors to our headquarters, a flow which had dropped drastically the previous year. However, in mid-year fighting again erupted in the northern and eastern

regions of the country. Although these areas are remote from our own quarters, the resurgence of the conflict has hindered our work by causing a serious dearth of printing paper. One of the two major paper mills on the island is located in the northeast, and as this plant has become inoperative due to the disturbed conditions in that area, the full burden of paper production has come to rest on the southern plant. This shortage of paper explains the delays we have faced in having our own publications printed, and also explains why our mailings have been reaching you far later than they should. We are presently trying to resolve this problem by arranging to obtain imported paper. To those of our readers who have been disappointed by these delays, we can only offer our apologies and ask your to understand our difficult situation. To those who have borne with us, we offer our heartfelt thanks for your patience and unflagging support.

In spite of the problems, this past year we managed to publish three new titles in the Wheel series: Dana: The Practice *of* Giving (Wh 367/369), a collection of essays; *Satipatthana* Vpassana (Wh 370/371), a treatise on insight meditation by Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw; and The Scale *of* Good *Deeds* (Wh 372), an exploration of the Velama Sutta by Susan Jootla. Accompanying these were three new Bodhi Leaves: The Self-made Private Prison, by Lily de Silva (BL 120); Why the Buddha Did Not Preach to a *Hungry Man,* by Louis van Loon (BL 121); and To Light a Fire, a discourse by Ven. Webu Sayadaw (BL 122). Besides our serial publications, we also issued two new full-size books. One was The Udana: *Inspired* Utterances *of* the Buddha, a marvellous little treasure from the Pali Canon, translated by John Ireland. The other was *Buddha,* My Refuge, a beautiful collection of texts on the qualities of the Enlightened One, compiled from this Pali suttas by Bhikkhu Khantipalo.

For the coming year we have another fine line-up of publications planned. We will begin the Wheel series for 1991 with *Looking Inward,* a collection of "observations on the art of meditation" by Acharn Kor (Khao-sun-luang), the incisive Thai woman meditation-teacher whose earlier *Directing* to Self-penetration (Wh 326/ 328) evoked many favourable comments from our readers. In mid-year we will issue Bhikkhu Nyanamoli's translation of the Sammaditthi Suns and its commentary, The Discourse on *Right* View. This work had been scheduled for this past year, but the task of transcribing and editing the commentary from the translator's notebook has proved to be more time-consuming than we expected. We will end the year with a fuller collection of Dhamma discourses by the great Burmese meditation master, Ven. Webu Sayadaw, whose earlier Bodhi Leaf discourse brought many inquires for more from this outstanding exemplar of the Buddha's path.

In our line of full-size books we hope to add to our translation series the canonical companion to the Udana, The *Itivuttaka:* The Buddha's Sayings, in a lucid and readable rendering by John Ireland. This work, a collection of 114 short suttas, contains many elevating and profound texts and often reaches a pitch of lofty spiritual exaltation. By the time this newsletter reaches you, the typesetting of the Visuddhimagga (too longdrawn out) should be complete and the book should be rolling through the press, if not already available. During the course of the year we also intend to issue the new edition of The *Manual of Abhidhamma* and Bhikkhu Nyanamoli's *Pali-English Glossary of Buddhist* Technical Terms. We also have in preparation a volume of essays on King Asoka and Buddhism, which should appear in late 1991 or early 1992. When these books appear, full information will be announced in the newsletter, so keep an eye on these columns.

NOTES AND NEWS

One of the consequences of the remarkable transformations that have swept over Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has been a newly acquired freedom of conscience, and one aspect of this freedom is a burgeoning interest in religion, for so long subjected to restrictions and repression. For a small but growing number of seekers in the former eastern block, this religious awakening has opened the portals to Buddhism.

The evolving interest in Buddhism has come to our attention via regular requests for books that have been crossing our desk since late 1989, either from individuals or budding Buddhist societies. The first contact of this kind took place last autumn, when to our surprise we received a letter from members of the **Leningrad Buddhist community.** These members had been introduced to Theravada Buddhism by two American vipassana teachers, Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Saizberg, and earnestly appealed to us for donations of books on the Dhamma. Heeding their request, we have sent them several parcels of our publications and continue to maintain contact with them. Most recently we learned of their intention to register their group as a separate Theravada Buddhist society. Then, a few months later, we received a letter from Prague announcing the formation of the Buddhist Society of Czechoslovakia and requesting Buddhist literature, "especially good and reliable translations." We responded with a generous set of books, and in their acknowledgement they state that the books we sent "are the best in our Society's library." Both the Leningrad group and the Prague society have been made complimentary members of the BPS. We have also sent gift parcels of books to small groups in Latvia, Poland and Hungary, and to individual inquirers even from Bulgaria and Romania.

Recently Bhikkhu Bodhi received a letter from a member of the Leningrad group, written partly in Pali! The writer, Andrey Paribock, is a Pali scholar at the Leningrad Oriental Institute, and also a practising Buddhist. He reports that among Russians "the spiritual quest is deep, serious and widespread," and thinks that "Theravada Buddhism, with its perspicuity, sober earnestness, and the immediately practical effectiveness of its meditation, will help to establish here in some years a not insignificant community." Mr. Paribock himself has published two books on Buddhism in the Russian language. One, a collection of Jataka stories, sold 50,000 copies immediately; the other, an edition of King Milinda's Questions with selected suttas, a volume of 500 pages, sold 10,000 copies in its first year in print. Ven. Bodhi replied to Mr. Paribock, partly in Pali, inviting him to visit Sri Lanka in order to make contact with the living tradition and to discuss a project for translating Buddhist books into Russian.

Ken and Visakha Kawasaki wish us to announce the establishment of the Buddhist Relief Mission, a non-profit organization staffed by volunteers, aimed at supporting the Buddha Sasana worldwide. The Mission's goals are: (1) to serve as a channel for international Buddhist aid; (2) to provide requisites to members of the Sangha and to assist Buddhist communities wherever help is needed; (3) to support and equip hospitals for the Sangha; (4) to encourage the publication and distribution of materials in various languages for the preservation and spread of the Dhamma; (5) to develop, reproduce and distribute audio-visual materials for the teaching of the Dhamma; (6) to contribute to local Buddhist charities, such as orphanages, old peoples' homes, schools, and conservation programs; (7) to act as a clearing house for information about Buddhism; (8) to serve as advocate for Buddhist concerns; (9) to foster cooperation among Buddhists worldwide. The intention is to remain at

the grassroots level, and to work in a practical and active manner. The founders invite suggestions and advice from Buddhists and Buddhist organizations. Contact: Ken & Visakha Kawasaki, Buddhist Relief Mission, 266-27 Ozuku-cho, Kashihara-shi, Nara-ken 634, Japan.

From the Daily News (Colombo, 14 July 1990): Mr. Zomar Punkes Ramos, (a Brazilian Buddhist) in Sri Lanka on a pilgrimage, said that Portuguese-speaking Brazilians face many hardships learning Buddhism. "Our main handicap is the lack of books in Portuguese. Our people generally do not know English. But for the few English-speaking Brazilians, the only redeeming feature is the Buddhist Publication Society of Kandy. The Wheel and Bodhi Leaves series provide our people with much food for thought. In fact, I have a twenty-year collection of the Wheel publications. I have learnt the Dhamma mostly through BPS books." _

GUIDELINES TO SUTTA STUDY

The Buddha's Intention. in expounding the Anattalakkhana Sutta, The Discourse on the Characteristic of Non-Self, is to expose the unreality of the ration of self or ego (atta). The notion of self is a fabrication of personality view (sakkaya-ditthī the most funds mental of all wrong views, which posits a self standing in some relationship to the five aggregates that comprise the psychophysical personality. Under the dominion of personality view we continually take one a another of the five aggregates to be ~I" and "mine,` and this dinging to notions of self keeps us in bondage to the round of repeated birth and death.

In the Anattalakkhana Sutta the Buddha lays down two separate lines of argument b remove the dinging to the aggregates as self. Each line of argument is sufficient in Itself, and in other suttas we see the Buddha employing one or the other of them exclusively in order to achieve his purpose. When, however, the two are taken in combination—as is done in this sutta—they prove a particularly powerful Instrument for dispelling the delusion of self.

These lines of argument are really themes for contemplation rather than food for intellectual cogitation and debate, and they yield their store of meaning b the extent that they are applied directly to one's own experience. Such lines of argument are necessary because the principle of non-self is the most subtle characteristic of existence disclosed by the Buddha in his teaching. R is so subtle in fact that only a Buddha can discover it unaided and fathom its full significance, while only disciples of extremely sharp faculties can penetrate the truth of anatta directly, without relying on some other reference point as a springboard for gaining insight Into selflessness. For the great majority it is necessary to begin with more accessible facts of experience and then, by following up their implications, see how they undermine the adherence to the notion of self.

The first line of argument used by the Buddha in the sutta unfolds from a subtle assumption inherent in the notion of self. This is the assumption of mastery or control. At a deep level the notion of self—of someone who we really are, of a substantial personal identity—implies the idea of a lord or master, one who possesses absolute control over the personality. Thus when the five aggregates are taken b be self or the property of self, this means that they must be completely susceptible to the exercise of mastery: we should be able to control them and bend them to our will without even the possibility of obstruction. The things taken to be self should conform to our wishes and heed our commands with unconditional obedience, just as a slave must obey his master.

Starting with the idea of mastery Implicit in the notion of self, the Buddha sets out to demonstrate that the things we usually identify with as self—the five aggregates—turn out under examination to be in reality not self. The reason they turn out b be in reality not self is precisely because we do not possess absolute control over them. We cannot exercise mastery over them at all, but to the contrary we often find ourselves undermined and victimized by them precisely through their stubborn resistance to the course of our desires.

That the five aggregates are not subject b our absolute control is seen by the fact that they lead b affliction. This is the comer-stone of the Buddha's first argument in the sutta. He points out that if material form, the first aggregate, were self, ft would not lead b affliction, and we would be able to have it of form "Let my form be thus, let my form not be thus." That is, form would bend immediately in whatever direction we want it b bend, and it would never bend in a direction that is contrary to our wishes.

We would only have to think, "Let my body be ever youthful, may ft never age" and it would obey; "Let my body be beautiful, not ugly" and it would obey; "Let my body always be healthy, never sick" and it would obey; "Let my body live forever, may it never die" and it would obey. But despite our most fervent wishes, the body moves in a direction that disappoints all our hopes; it grows old, it may be ugly and deformed, it falls sick, and it dies.

In short, the body tends to affliction, and by tending to affliction it reveals that it is not amenable to our control, that it is not susceptible to mastery. It is an impersonal conditioned phenomenon, governed by laws of conditionality and modifiable only within the limits of these laws. For this reason it is not our self, not our genuine identity, not our property. Thus the Buddha concludes, with regard to form: "And since form is not self, so it leads to affliction, and none can have it of form: 'Let my form be thus, let my form not be thus.'"

(to be continued)

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