

# Buddhism

## Philosophy or Religion?

### I

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From the liberalistic point of view a solution of the problem “Is Buddhism to be reckoned as Philosophy or Religion?” is impossible, as the liberalistic principle denies the possibility of a religious plane at all. This article follows the principle of a rational method of the Comparative Study of the History of Religions from the non-liberal, i.e. anti-liberal point of view. As the writer is more than convinced of the super-excellence of Vaishnavism as the Transcendental Spiritual and Absolute True Religion over all Religions with limited, crippled and restricted ideas of the ontological Subject, objects and the relation between both, and, all the more, over all philosophies as products of secondary sensuous introspection into the acts and facts before our senses and mind and the conclusions drawn from the faulty premises of our empirical methods, he sees no necessity to distort the object of his comparison for securing the favourable result of a comparative study, distortion, a method so widely prevalent amongst the so-called liberal and “orthodox” scholars of higher or lower intelligence, being the refuge of those who see no other way to establish the seeming half-believed, half-doubted pre-eminence of their fold. The writer, therefore, puts before the reader in the first paragraph an exposition of the teachings of Gautama Buddha as contained in the Pali-Scriptures following the hermeneutic principle of keeping himself strictly to the respective passages of the said Scriptures. In the second paragraph he ventures to give an interpretation of what Buddhism stands for and a solution of the question if it may be reckoned as Philosophy or Religion. The reader is in this way enabled to form for himself an opinion on both paragraphs

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whereby the latter will be approved – and surely improved and extended – by the unprejudiced mind of any reader who takes a vital interest in the search for God.

Gautama Buddha started his activities and propaganda by an exposition of the four “Noble Truths”. He laid great stress on the fact that these four basic principles of the Dhamma do not belong to the traditional dogma. The pitakas are nothing but an explicit commentary of these four truths, illustrated and described in a graphic way by examples taken from daily life. Gautama Buddha characterized the proper task of his mission and activities by his constantly repeated utterance: “One thing only, ye monks, I am going to make known to you today and on and on: the sufferings and the elimination of the sufferings.” The four truths are (1) the truth about the sufferings (*dukkha*), (2) the genesis of the sufferings (*dukkhasamudya*), (3) the elimination of the sufferings (*dukkhaniroda*) and (4) the path which leads towards the elimination of the sufferings (*dukkhanirodhagamini patipada*). *The elimination of the sufferings* is the only goal Gautama Buddha’s teachings are pointing at. He does not care for anything else which does not directly serve that purpose. The original Buddhism is, therefore, confined within the human zoeisis, within the realm of what human senses can experience and comprehend. Buddha rejected all questions which required a reply from any higher authority than the experience of every sane man. “This, ye monks, is the noble truth of the sufferings: birth is sorrowful, old age is sorrowful, disease is sorrowful, death is sorrowful; grief, affliction, pain, sadness and despair are sorrowful; to be in contact with undesirabilities is sorrowful, to be separated from the beloved ones is sorrowful, not to get what is wanted is sorrowful. In short, the five groups of attachment are sorrowful.” “This, ye monks, is the noble truth of the genesis of the sufferings: It is the thirst, producing rebirth, accompanied by likings and lust, which is enjoying now here now there, i.e. the thirst after sensuous enjoyment, the thirst after existence, thirst after elimination of existence.” “This, ye monks, is the noble truth of the elimination of the sufferings: it is absolute, trackless final elimination, giving up, rejection, getting rid of and expulsion of this thirst.” “This, ye monks, is the noble truth of the path which leads towards the elimination of the sufferings, it is the noble eightfold path: *proper mode of viewing things* (i.e. the knowledge of the four truths), *proper disposition* (i.e. the disposition of renunciation, i.e. to be free from sensuous lust

and desires; freedom from ill-will; the disposition of not doing any harm to any animate being); *proper speech* (i.e. to desist from speaking untruth, backbiting, rude language and idle babble); *proper deeds* (i.e. to desist from destroying life, from taking things that have not been given and from any kind of unchastity); *proper conduct* (i.e. to give up a perverted mood of professional conduct and following the proper lines of conduct); *proper fighting* (i.e. a monk is producing in his heart the will not to allow non-existing bad and detrimental moods and conditions to be produced, and by exercising all his energy he is fighting, struggling and inciting his mind. He produces the will to drive out existing bad and detrimental moods and conditions, and by exercising all his energy he is fighting, struggling and inciting his mind. He is producing the will to awaken non-existing, conducive moods and conditions and by exercising all his energy he is fighting, struggling and inciting his mind. He produces the will to preserve existing, conducive moods and conditions, not to make them disappear but to cultivate them and by exercising all his energy he is fighting, struggling and inciting his mind); *proper contemplation* (a monk is contemplating in clear awareness and consciousness on the nature of his body, his sensations, his thoughts and congregates in order to overcome desires and sorrow in this life); *proper concentration* (attainment of the four jhanas). (Samy. LVI)

All things, realities – dhamma – all aggregates, processes, and sankhara are anicca, i.e. changeable, coming and going, perishable, *dukkha* i.e., finally they are all ending in sorrow and pain and *anatta*, i.e. not the self. Salvation from the realm of anatta is the proper goal of Buddhism. Everything, every sensation and conception belongs to the sphere of the non-self. (Ang. III, 134; Dhammapada 277–279) This is the dogma of the *tilakkhana*.

According to the definition of the sufferings the 5 *upadanakkhandha*, i.e., the five groups of attachment constitute the aggregate of the first truth: the attachment to bodily form – *rupa*, it may be present or past or future, own or foreign, gross or subtle, beautiful or ugly, near or far; the attachment to *vedana* – sensuous impression and sensation; the attachment to *sanna* – perception; to *sankhara* – emotions or processes, *vinanna* – consciousness and awareness. (Samy. XXII, 48) *Rupa* is the name for the 4 *mahabhutas* pathavidhatu, apodhatu, tejodhatu and

vayodhatu. *Vedana* is the collective notion for the sensation of agreeable, disagreeable and neutral impressions. *Sanna* has to do with the perception of blue, yellow, red and white. *Sankhara* are of three kinds: physical, lingual and mental processes. *Vinanna* is to be differentiated according to the process by means of which it comes into existence, i.e. conditioned by physical forms and the eye – by sounds and the ear – by smells and the nose – by juice and the tongue – by objects of touch and contact – by objects of mental perception and the mind. (Samy. XXII, 48; Mahhj. 28; Samy. XXII, 79 ib. XII, 27; Majjy. 38)

The five *upadanakkhandha* are *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*. The proper view of the reality, as it is, makes us see them in this way: “This does not belong to me, this I am not and this is not my self. (Mahavagga I, 6. 38–48)

The body is changeable, sorrowful and not the self, the cause and the condition of its genesis are changeable, sorrowful and not the self. How may unchangeable, joyful and self-characterised effects result from changeable, sorrowful and not-the-self causes and conditions? There is no unchangeable, immutable etc., body, sensuous impression and sensation, perception, process or emotion, consciousness and awareness. If a disciple properly has understood this, he is tired of all these five groups. By being tired of them he gets rid of passion; by being free from passions he is saved and in the saved disciple the knowledge arises: “I am liberated, rebirth has been exhausted, holy conduct has been lived, what had to be done, has been done, there is no more any world for me – thus he understands.” (Samy. XXII, 97)

The dogma of the conditioned genesis (Paticcasamuppada) is the fundamental knowledge which constituted Gautama Buddha’s enlightenment. “If this is, then is also that; if this is not, then this is also not. By eliminating this, that is eliminated i.e. where there is *avijja* – nescience – there are organic processes (*sankhara*); where there are *sankhara*, there is consciousness (*vinanna*); there is name-and-form (*namarupa*); *salayatana* (the six planes of the activity of the senses) *phassa* (contact); *vedana* (sensuous impression and sensation); *tanha* (thirst); *upadana* (attachment, catching hold of) *bhava* (coming into existence); *jati* (birth resp. rebirth); *jaramarana* (old age and death). The absolute elimination of the

nescience is the basic fundament for the elimination of the organic processes, etc. In this way the whole compound of all kinds of suffering is eliminated. All these 12 links of the causal chain are properly understood by the Tathagata, i.e. by one who has attained enlightenment, and he is propounding, explaining and illustrating them to the world (Udana I, 3; Samy. XII, 20)

*Nescience* is the ignorance of the four noble truths. Physical, lingual and mental processes are called organic processes. The 6 kinds of consciousness differentiated according to the senses constitute the consciousness. Sensation, perception, the process of thinking, contact and imagination are called name. The mahabhutas are called form. The 6 senses constitute the respective realm of the six planes of the activity of the senses. Contact is established through the medium of the 6 senses. *Vedana* are of six kinds: produced by visual, aural, nasal, lingual, tasting and mental contact. Thirst is thirst after forms, sounds, smells, juice, objects of touch and objects of mental perception. Attachment is concerned with sensuous desires, wrong views, of ritualism, the wrong view identifying phenomenal things with the true self. Coming into existence takes place in the world of sensuous desires, of forms or formlessness. Birth is the process of conception and catching hold of the six senses. Old age and death is the decay and ruin of the body and mental organ. (Samy. XII, 2)

The eight-fold path is the means towards the elimination of the Causal Chain. (Samy. XII, 27)

Every deed of every animate being bears its fruit according to the detrimental (akusala) or conducive (kusala) character of its intention. This dogma of karmic law is combined with the dogma of birth and rebirth. As all deeds bear their respective fruits, deeds themselves should be eliminated by following the eight-fold noble path. (Samy. XXXV, 145)

This Samsaric world is burning? What is burning? The forms, the sounds etc. etc. the see-consciousness, the contact of the eye with the objects, the sensation arising from this contact – it may be agreeable, disagreeable or neutral. And what makes them burn? The fire of lust, the fire of hatred, the fire of illusions, the fire

of birth, old age and death, sorrow, pains, afflictions, grief and despair. (Mahavagga I, 21, I – 4; Samy. XXXV, 28)

By elimination of the thirst the whole process of causal conditions is eliminated and the world ceases to exist with the attainment of true enlightenment as to the nature of the thirst. Everything, every person, every impression is sorrowful in the long run. “Those who love three beings, have three sorrows; those who love two beings, have two sorrows; those who love one being, have one sorrow; those who don’t love anything, they don’t experience any sorrow or pain. They are free from grief; free from dust; free from despair. Whatever may be painful, sorrowful and to be suffered in this world – all these afflictions date from attachment to something that is loved. Where there is no love, there is no affliction. Therefore those alone are happy and free from afflictions, who don’t love anything in this world. He who wants to get rid of grief, dust and despair should not love anything.” (Udana VIII, 8)

Rebirth can take place in the following five realms: *Niraya* or hell; *Tiracchanayoni* or animal kingdom; *pittivisaya* or *petaloka*, the world of the ghosts; *manussa*, the human creation; and *deva*, the realm of the angels and gods. Nothing in these worlds is permanent and eternal: even the gods are changeable, perishable. “Even Maha-Brahma, ye monks, is changeable and mutable. If the noble disciple is understanding this, he is tired, and being tired, he turns his back even to the highest and all the more to the lowest objects.” (Ang. IV, 33)

The final goal the Buddhist is striving after is called *Nibbanna*, i.e. extinction, going out; it means the total emancipation from any kind of thirst. Nibanna is of two kinds: Sa-upadisesa-nibanna or kilesa-nibbana or tanha-nibbana, i.e. the state an Arahat can attain while still living in this world where the five groups still have their limited play and anapadisesa-nibanna or khandha-nibbana or kamma-nibanna or pari-nibbana, i.e. the state of freedom from the khandhas after the decay of the body. Nibbana is called *nicca*, i.e. eternal and *sukha*, i.e. true happiness and joy; it is the realm where there is neither death nor birth. As there is something unborn, uncreated, it is possible to get out of the born, the created world. (Itivuttaka 43) It is the realm without coming and going, standing, production and destruction. It is

without beginning – it is the end of all sufferings. (Udana VIII, 1–4) When Gautama Buddha was asked, if the Tathagata *is* (in a state of becoming existence) after his death, he replied that he did not disclose that he is (in such a state), that he is not, is and is not or neither is nor is not. Why? Because it does not lead to higher knowledge, enlightenment and nibanna. But he revealed the four noble truths and the path leading to the final nibanna. (Samy. XVI, 12) The way of a spark of fire, of an extinct flame, can not be traced. Where the Sankharas have been eliminated, the ocean of thirst and lust has been crossed, all possibilities of speech are exhausted, there is no more any conception, nor explanation.

Gautama Buddha wanted to make his disciples independent of his own person. “*You* have to push ahead – the Tathagatas are only preachers!” (Dhammapada 276) His disciples are called *Ariva*, i.e. noble people, saints or *Ariyavasaka*, i.e. holy disciples or *Ariyapuggala*, i.e. holy people. The classification of *Upasakas* and *Bhikkhus* is only social. The disciples are divided into four groups: (1) *Sotapannas*, i.e. those who entered the current. The first three shackles *Sakkayaditthi*, i.e. the belief that the personality is identical with the self; *vicikiccha*, doubt and *silabbataparamasa*, i.e. the belief in the efficacy of rites are broken when entering into the current. (2) *Sakadagamin*, i.e. he who returns only once again into the kama-loka. *Kamaraga*, i.e. sensuous desire and *patigha*, i.e. inner contest are partially overcome. (3) *Anagamin*, he who does not return. Shackles 1–5 are completely eliminated. (4) *Arahat*, namely the saint. *Ruparaga*, i.e. the desire to return to the realm of forms, *aruparaga*, i.e. the desire to come to the formless world, *mana*, i.e. pride, *uddhacca*, i.e. inner restlessness and *avijja*, i.e. nescience have ceased to afflict the Arhat.

To deal with metaphysical problems Gautama Buddha considered as detrimental to the final cause. If a man would not like to follow him because he did not give elucidation as to the eschatological, ontological and metaphysical question after the nature of the liberated soul and the state of his existence, the finite or infinite condition of this world, the difference between life and physical processes, Gautama Buddha would compare his attitude with that of a man wounded by a poisoned arrow and still disallowing the physician to remove it unless he gets to know who shot the arrow, to what caste and family this man belongs, if he is tall

or small or of middle size, what kind of pigmentation may be found in his skin, from what place he is coming, what kind of bow, what instruments were used to prepare the dangerous instrument, the poison which has been applied to the arrow, etc. etc. Long before all his questions can be solved, the poor fellow would be expired. But the doctor has come and the 4 noble truths have been revealed. We should not make any delay. (Majjh. 63) All opinions and views of metaphysical problems should be given up as hindering the proper process. People arrive at different conclusions due to their ignorance of the causal chain. But who is enjoying and suffering, attached and lust-driven? Who? “Who is enjoying the food of the consciousness? This question is not properly put. I don’t say that somebody enjoys. But if you ask me what is the use of this food I would tell you that due to it rebirth is made possible.” (Samy. XII, 12) “Don’t allow yourselves to be directed to what you hear only from hearsay, from tradition, from rumours, holy scriptures, speculations, dogma, deliberations based on the apparent view on things, long-cherished views and opinions, from the admission or denial, by your opinion that such an ascetic is your master – but if you discern that such and such things are conducive or detrimental to the final course of getting rid of the sufferings, then you should act and react accordingly.” (Ang. III, 65)

Like a line formed by blind people, one following the other, neither the first nor the middle nor the last man sees anything, are the words of the Brahmins who are versed in the three Vedas. Their words are ridiculous, meaningless, empty and vain. None of the Brahmins who are versed in the three Vedas saw Brahma face to face, and they did not say: “We know it, we see it, where Brahma is, who Brahma is, towards what direction Brahma is.” These Brahmins are telling: “What we don’t know, what we don’t see, to that very thing we are showing the path and are saying: this is the right path, the direct path, the way to salvation that leads to communion with Brahma.” But Gautama Buddha knows the way how to attain enlightenment and final nibanna. (Digh. XIII)

The Buddhist method of contemplation leads through the four jhanas of the form-region to the unlimited realm of space, consciousness, not-anything and neither-perception-nor-non-perception. The jhanas are mundane – lokiya – conditions and effect, only temporary relief from bad conditions. Adhicitta and Adhipanna-



training are leading to Samatha, i.e. peace, the temporary relief from inner obstacles, and vipassana, i.e. deep insight, the intuitive comprehension of the four noble truths, and the three characteristics of all phenomena. To enter into the Nibanna vipassana is required, whereas samatha and the jhanas cannot directly affect the entrance into the final state. The production of the four Bhavanas – kindness towards all beings, compassion, joy and equanimity – are preliminary methods before entering into the four jhanas. Ethical purity, awareness of all mental and physical processes and detachment from any phenomenal attractive aggregate are the stages a Buddhist disciple has to go through before he is able to attain freedom from nescience, i.e. before the causal chain can be eliminated.