

## **BUDDHISM: A RELIGION, A PHILOSOPHY, OR A WAY OF LIFE?**

**Ven. Olande Ananda**

*(Summary of Public Lecture delivered on 28.12.2010)*

Buddhism can be seen as a combination of all these three aspects: religion, philosophy, a way of life.

It is a religion in the sense that there is a Founder (Gautama, the Buddha), there are scriptures (the *Tipitaka*), there is an Order of ordained *bhikkhu-s* and *bhikkhuni-s* and lay followers both male and female, there are temples, with their rites and rituals, their preachings, their teachings, their meditation centres.

Buddhism started developing during the life of the Buddha, after he started the Wheel of the Dhamma, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, at the Deer Park in Sarnath, near Benares, shortly after his enlightenment in Bodhgaya.

After the followers had reached stages of sainthood, Arahanta-s, the Buddha sent all his first sixty Arahanta disciples in different directions 'for the welfare and happiness of the many' (*bahujana hithaya, bahujana sukhaya*). In

that sense Buddhism is even a missionary religion.

However, the Buddha warned his disciples against accepting anything on mere blind belief, but to scrutinize and examine everything for oneself and only after being convinced of its truth and goodness, to accept the Teaching, the Dhamma.

We have the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha — the Enlightened One, his Teachings and the Order of ordained monks and nuns and their lay followers.

Soon Buddhism spread far and wide, especially after Emperor Ashoka embraced the Dhamma and got 84,000 stupas and temples built all around his vast empire.

The Teachings (Dhamma) of the Buddha began when he was 35 years old (after his enlightenment in Bodhgaya) and continued until the age of 80 (his Parinirvana in Kushinara). Kings and bankers offered vast monasteries to

the Buddha and his *bhikkhu*-s, such as Jetavanarama in Sravasti, offered by Anathapindika.

A retinue of 500 Sakyan ladies from the court, including Prince Siddhartha's foster mother, Maha Pajapati Gotami, walked all the way to his monastery to claim ordination for women, which the Buddha — after Ven. Ananda's pleas and the ladies' moans — reluctantly acceded. This made Buddhism the first religion in the world with a female monks' Order.

The Dhamma can be seen as a philosophy, but as a practical philosophy, not somewhere high in the sky, but with global thinking and local acting, placing both our feet on the ground and the head towards the Sun and beyond.

The Buddha was already speaking of different worlds and levels of existence, a cosmology that was way ahead of his times. Also, the Buddha spoke of the infinity of the number of Universes.

The Buddha taught the Panca Niyama-s or Five Laws of Cause and Effect: the Bija Niyama or Law of the Seed; Utthu Niyama or Law of the Environment/Climate; Kamma Niyama

or the Law of Cause and Effect in the Moral/Ethical sphere; Citta Niyama or the Law of the Mind, which gives Man the choice to do something or not to do something or to do it in a different way; the Dhamma Niyama or Law of Natural Cause and Effect, such as the influence of the Sun, Moon, planets and stellar constellations, radiation, gravity, etc.

Buddhism can be seen as a 'Way of Life' if one inculcates the Teachings on *sila*, *samadhi* and *pragna* — ethics, mental development and wisdom — into one's daily life. Then Buddhism becomes a personal Path, without dogma, but with a sound moral foundation, mental strength and equanimity, based on mindfulness and good qualities such as *maitri*, *karuna*, *mudita* and *upekkha* — loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

Wisdom comes in different ways and at different levels: by hearing and reading (*sutta-maya pragna*), by thinking, reasoning, discussion and investigation within oneself (*chinta-maya pragna*), and Wisdom which comes from meditation or insight (*bhavana-maya pragna*).



For within you is the light of the world — the only light that can be shed upon the Path. If you are unable to perceive it within you, it is useless to look for it elsewhere. It is beyond you; because when you reach it you have lost yourself. It is unattainable, because it for ever recedes. You will enter the light, but you will never touch the flame.

*Light on the Path*

# TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE INDIA

**Mr N. R. Narayana Murthy**

*(Summary of Besant Lecture delivered on 27.12.2010)*

Mr Narayana Murthy, Founder, Chairman and Chief Mentor, Infosys, Bangalore, was welcomed onto the Adyar Theatre by the International President, Mrs Radha Burnier. Mr S. Sundaram, General Secretary of the Indian Section of the TS, presided over the function and introduced the speaker. In his opening words, Mr Narayana Murthy stated that Dr Annie Besant was a reformist, a secularist and a profound believer in India's freedom. She had encouraged people, he said, to find out the causes of sorrow. There are many causes of sorrow in the world today. India is living a period of deep sorrow due to extreme corruption. Another cause of sorrow, the speaker said, is the critical issue of sustainability of our planet.

There are many challenges facing the world today: poverty, racial unrest, unemployment and the depleting of natural resources. We have the responsibility of creating a sustainable world. Sustainability is not just moderating human consumption; it is also establishing a relationship of harmony with the environment. If this harmony continues to be broken we will continue to be exposed to the perils of extreme poverty, hunger, insecurity, global warming and repeated threats to democracy. At the national level, Mr Narayana Murthy stated, the government has to deliver basic needs to its

citizens such as food, water, energy and education. When these are lacking there is violence and vandalism. One question facing us all is: How do we give this planet back to the next generations?

The level of human consumption in the world today is fifty percent more than the sustainable level. Many species have now become extinct. Carbon emissions have now increased elevenfold. As for the population, we will need two planets to absorb the CO<sub>2</sub> waste which will be generated. The United States, China and India contribute to fifty percent of carbon emissions worldwide. The speaker also mentioned that the present concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> is the highest in the last two million years.

Recent statistics show that 360 million Indians live below the poverty line. There is decrease of water resources in this country. In the world today, one billion people do not have access to clear, drinking water. Water scarcity will become a reality in just a few decades. The recent Cancun conference on climate change yielded positive results in the task of reducing the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub>. Corporations have also taken important steps in this direction. However, each individual is ultimately responsible for the sustainability of our planet and the future of life on this globe. As C. N. Annadurai said, 'Let us wake up.'



# THE NATURE OF THE TRUE PATH

Colin Price

*(Summary of Short Lecture delivered on 28.12.2010)*

One of the most frequently used analogies for progressing in the spiritual life is that of travelling along a path. As with all journeys the traveller has to decide upon the destination and the method of travel, which even in the spiritual life varies greatly from person to person. However the Theosophical message strikes a common chord with people of many different religious persuasions and cultural backgrounds with its emphasis on truth as a primary objective in the spiritual quest.

Both philosophy and the theologies associated with the various world religions are intent on declaring the nature of truth and the way to discover it. However there is such a huge diversity of answers offered to the question 'What is Truth?' that the enquirer might well feel confused.

It is to Madame Blavatsky's everlasting credit that having spent many years travelling across the continents of the world experiencing a wide range of cultures and religions she dared to propound the universal truth regardless of the consequences and the personal antagonism directed against her. In the Proem at the beginning of *The Secret Doctrine* she sets down three fundamental propositions which become the very first step on the path and help to define both its nature and direction.

The first proposition deals with the vexed subject of the nature of deity: the concept of an unknowable first cause of

all that exists unimaginable and beyond the reach of human thought and yet interpenetrating all time and space and in a deeply mystical way Being all time and space far beyond the anthropomorphic concepts of God in most religions.

We get our first major clue as to the true nature of the path when HPB answers the question 'To whom, then, do you pray when you do so?' She says: To our Father in heaven — in its esoteric meaning. An occultist or Theosophist addresses his prayer to his Father which is in secret, not to an extra-cosmic and therefore finite God; and that Father is in man himself . . . In our sense, the inner man is the only God of whom we can have cognizance.

In his book entitled *The Search Within* Christmas Humphreys suggests that the path is an inward one which can only be travelled by those who practise meditation and embark upon the long process of 'Self'-finding. HPB refers to this Self as our 'Spiritual Self'; she says that the divine spark in man being one and identical in essence with the Universal Spirit, our 'Spiritual Self' is practically omniscience, but that it cannot manifest its knowledge owing to the impediments of matter. This higher or spiritual Self is the seat of conscience and will and the progress along this inward path is determined by our ordinary mind, emotions and body learning obedience to the will of the divine Self within. It is an essential

feature of the true path that it can only be travelled by those who are prepared to continually practise this obedience.

In *The Voice of the Silence* we read ‘. . . the body is not SELF. The SELF is in itself without a body.’ It describes the path as ‘The Secret Path’ — the way of renunciation — the one selected by the Buddhas of perfection, Those who have chosen to live a life to benefit mankind

and to practise the six glorious virtues.

The path is therefore a path of Self-discovery at two levels concurrently. At the level of our personality and our ordinary everyday consciousness and at the higher spiritual level of our individuality which reincarnates life after life and progresses eventually to the goal of realization of our Selves within the all-embracing absolute truth.

## **THE WATCHFUL EYE THAT OBSERVES**

**C. A. Shinde**

*(Summary of Short Lecture delivered on 28.12.2010)*

The Theme of the Convention is Theosophical Teachings on the Path. The Path is the Path of service and sacrifice. It is the way of holiness and there is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer, there is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through and there is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount, says H. P. Blavatsky in her *Collected Writings*. Many of us are aware that the Theosophical Society has been engaged in the important pioneering task of spreading the message of Universal Brotherhood without any kind of distinction, through its branches all over the world. Universal Brotherhood is a fact. It needs to be discovered individually, for which one needs to have a Watchful Eye. The Watchful Eye is the eye of understanding, the eye that sees clearly beyond the outer form. It does not get stuck to the outer form

because it sees the One Essence, One Life, One Consciousness in the midst of diverse forms. With the ability of this eye of understanding, one observes and knows about his inner self and outer environment. On the Path, he questions authority in a spirit of enquiry and open-mindedness. He develops patience and an optimistic view and lays great stress on right conduct and right action. With such a quality of watchfulness, a dimensional change in his consciousness takes place. His perception becomes progressively sharper and he understands the meaning of the great statements of the Masters of the Wisdom and the statements of spiritually enlightened personalities; for instance, there is a statement in a Mahatma letter: ‘The Real knowledge here spoken of is not mental but a spiritual state implying full Union between the knower and the known.’ He understands the meaning

because his observation becomes an observation without the observer within. He comprehends statements like 'Truth is a pathless land', that the land is inherent in his own heart and he sees it above him, below him, surrounding him, penetrating his being. There are as many paths to divinity as there are human hearts. Thus he opens his heart to such a Truth and his observation attains a dimensional change, and understanding becomes a law in his life, the life that is visible as well as invisible. He then understands the real

meaning of statements like the perfume of a flower (which is invisible) is the flower, and the very flower (which is visible) is the essence of that flower. He now knows and understands that *patient and effortless observation* without the observer within his psyche is required. The Teachings emphasize the need for a generous heart that sees clearly to the depths of the outer form of the One Life. The Watchful Eye, in this sense, is an eye of understanding through a generous heart that has the quality of both Devotion and Wisdom.

## **THE THEOSOPHICAL ORDER OF SERVICE**

*(Symposium held on 28.12.2010)*

### **Ms Dorothy Bell, TOS, Australia**

TOS activities are richly varied. Worldwide patterns emerge. To combat pollution, for example, the TOS in Argentina produces free literature on the environment and the TOS in the United States engages in battery recycling. To combat ignorance and illiteracy, educational materials are donated in Argentina; the TOS in Sweden supports underprivileged children in neighbouring Latvia; the TOS in New Zealand sponsors the education of children overseas and collects thousands of books to send to the Philippines; the TOS in Australia tutors refugees in the English language; the TOS in America provides educational material to a Native American reservation. Other TOS volunteer initiatives in America, New Zealand and Australia include supporting the homeless and refugees from domestic violence, war veterans, the aged and sick, and others alienated by mainstream society. The Healing Ritual is also a regular commitment of many groups.

### **Mr Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, TOS, The Philippines**

East Africa, Pakistan and the Philippines have well-established TOS activities, principally in the area of education for the needy. These regions of the globe enjoy steadily increasing communication and collaboration with members in countries such as Italy, the United States, England, Canada, Singapore, France, Australia and New Zealand. In the past two years, a significant development has been the

opening of theosophically-oriented courses at tertiary level at the Golden Link College in suburban Manila for which significant support has been received through a Kern Foundation matching grant. The friendly links created by international projects bring joy to participants, who report that the skills and inner resources called upon when engaging in service tend to enrich their spiritual lives. This is especially true of TOS workers in Pakistan where the political circumstances call for great courage in carrying on the work.

### **Mr B. L. Bhattacharya, TOS, India**

The TOS in India touches tens of thousands of lives each year. Through more than one hundred active groups spread over twenty regions, it runs schools, coaching classes, pre-primary learning centres, boarding establishments for the blind and for orphans, medical dispensaries as well as naturopathy, acupressure, ayurvedic treatment, yoga therapy and pranic healing centres. The TOS healing ritual is widely performed. Examples of recent innovative work include the dental care programme of the Delhi region; the 'Save a Thalasaemic child' programme of the Mahabharat group of Orissa; the relief work of the Mathurapur group for the victims of last year's cyclone Aila; the construction of three new schools in the Aila-affected Sunderbans area and the animal welfare work of the Assam region.

## **THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD**

Although the membership in the American Section has fallen by approximately two hundred and fifty members, the National President, Mrs Betty Bland, reports 'a year of intense activity'. David Bruce was appointed as the new National Secretary, but will also be responsible for the educational work. The programmes for prisons have continued. In the audio-video department there are one hundred and thirty-five titles. The Olcott Memorial Library activities have gone on well.

There were several Summer Schools and some other programmes during the year in Argentina. *The Theosophist* in Spanish continues to be translated and is printed there. In addition to the fifteen Lodges, the Section has an

administrative connection with Lodge *Fraternidad*, Asuncion, in Paraguay, which holds weekly meetings. Regular meetings are also held at the Theosophical Centre at San Rafael.

Brazil has a membership of 747, but 1500 copies of their magazine are printed for circulation. Five regional secretaries have been appointed to stimulate the TS, and several videos were sent to each region. Emphasis is laid on relating study to practical living.

Mrs Isis Resende, from Brazil, gave a series of talks in Montevideo in December 2009. In March 2010 there was another series of talks on 'The Path of Vegetarianism'. Mrs Dolores Gago spoke on 'Ancient Wisdom — Modern Insight' in April and May.



The work continues in Venezuela, Colombia and Chile. In Colombia, meetings were held throughout the year and Theosophical books were studied. Chile reports that members have contributed towards the rebuilding of the Lodge after the earthquake. It was also reported that electronic publications were well received.

The work, including study courses, in Cuba, continued with enthusiasm. The annual convention was held with the theme 'The Law of Unity and the Present Theosophical Society'. All the members of the Lodges have tried to maintain inner harmony. Some members attended the World Congress in Italy.

The General Secretary in Mexico organized a number of well-attended courses. Ms Isis Resende travelled with the General Secretary around the Section and held courses for the members and the public. A Wisdom School of Theosophy was conducted by Lissette Arroyo and was held in Morelos.

The work is going on as usual in Bolivia. In La Paz, programmes were carried on and they received a few visitors. The Lodge Teotl in El Salvador celebrated one hundred years since it was founded.

In Peru, eight public lectures were arranged during the year, and a course of Esoteric Philosophy was offered by Sister Edith Pomar. On Christmas Day, a big celebration was held which all the

members enjoyed. The TOS collected medicines, clothes, etc., for old people. The Theosophical Society has won the first of a three-part judgement to get their land and have a good possibility of success later.

The work has gone on as usual in Costa Rica and very recently an application to charter a new Lodge was received. Mrs Maria Orlich reported that all the important Theosophical days were celebrated but there was a small decrease of three members.

In the Dominican Republic, Mr Terry Hunt gave lectures, and visited two places. There were about forty participants and many were not members. Mrs Nelda Samarel gave a public lecture on 'The Aura and Invisible Human Fields'.

The Singapore Lodge has three hundred and sixty-six members, an increase of twenty-two over last year. Singapore could easily become a Section, except for the fact that there is only one Lodge in this small country. The International President visited Singapore on her way back from the World Congress in Rome and spoke on 'Future Work'.

The Nippon Lodge held monthly meetings at Tokyo with an average attendance of twelve. They studied H. P. Blavatsky's works, and also published some translations, the most recent being Irving Cooper's *Theosophy Simplified*. A bi-monthly Japanese *Theosophist* goes out, which is appreciated.

**Number of delegates registered by noontime on Tuesday, 28 December: 1,424.**



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