

# BUDDHISM

*From the French of*

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IN these few pages no complete account of Buddhist doctrines can be offered, still less a History of Buddhism. Our aim must therefore be to furnish the reader with a few general observations which will familiarize him with the Buddhist mind, and may lead him to have recourse to the sources themselves and to completer treatises. Though we shall not wholly neglect later Buddhism, we shall chiefly dwell upon its earliest forms: the (Bibliography p. 30) will to some extent remedy this defect.<sup>1</sup>

## I. PRE-BUDDHIST BRAHMINISM

Vedism, or ancient Brahminism—the shape, that is, which Indo-European religious tradition assumed in India about the second millennium B.C.—can be reduced to a very few essential elements.

1. *The Dead.*—The destiny of the dead depends strictly upon the services rendered to them by their descendants in the male line, born in legitimate wedlock, and properly initiated into religious rites. Hence flows a strict obligation to marry, not only to ensure a man's personal happiness after death, but also that of his ancestors. Hence too a strict obli-

<sup>1</sup> The present number of Buddhists cannot properly be ascertained. The only genuine Buddhists of any education are monks. All statistics which assign very large numbers to this "religion" are therefore practically valueless, just as it would be untruthful to reckon all the pagans of the Roman Empire as Stoics or Platonists.

gation to fulfil all funeral ceremonies—cremation, as a rule—and those of commemoration, *e.g.* anniversary banquets for the dead—and finally, the daily offerings. The proper accomplishment of these rites itself depends upon ceremonies of a sacramental character which affect the whole of a man's life, from conception to initiation (which heralds a period of submission and of study in the house of a professor), and to marriage.

Alongside of the earlier conception of the dead man living on in his tomb, and requiring nourishment, or residing in some vague "lower" world, or "in the south," exists the belief that at least the dead who have lived well pass to a place of light, where they live in company with the first dead man, Yama, and the great god Varuna. "Fathers" (*pitaras*) are souls in bliss, who are useful to their descendants. The "defunct" (*pretas*) are the dead who have not yet attained the abode of bliss, or ghosts. The problem of the retribution of sin in the future life has not yet been thoroughly discussed.

2. The *gods*, who are to be adored, praised, nourished with ordinary foods and especially with *soma* (an unknown juice), are, roughly, very powerful, indeed all-powerful beings, benevolent, and orderers of the world. Some are extremely moral, and indeed almost transcendent. It seems certain that most of them are personifications of the greater natural phenomena. The fire on a man's hearth is thus a God-Friend, intimately bound up with the family, yet identically the same fire as shines in the sky.

It is scarcely worth while to mention that the exalted ideas of order and morality which exist in this religion do not exclude inferior elements—magic, animism, etc.<sup>1</sup> These elements, however, are but little represented, and, in fact, not at all in the Veda *par excellence*, the Rigveda or collection of hymns for the great Brahminic sacrifice.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lect. I. p. 4.

3. These elements are, no doubt, found in almost all "primitive" religions. Yet specifically Vedic and Indian features are very numerous: Indra, master of the thunder, bears only the remotest resemblance to Zeus; the Vedic sacrifice is quite different from the Homeric or Semitic sacrifice: the various shades of difference can be studied in special works on Vedism. But in essentials, and in such "dogma" as there is in it, we must certainly regard the oldest Brahminism as an Indo-European rather than a Hindu religion.

The Hindu or genuinely Brahmin characteristics make themselves felt, however, very early.

As the result of events of which we have only the most imperfect information, sacrifice became a liturgical process of extreme complexity: professional knowledge became necessary for its due performance. Alone the Brahmins could officiate, for they were the heirs of a technical lore, qualified by fact of birth to be intermediaries between gods and men. Not all Brahmins, however, consecrated themselves to the service of the altar. Schools of sacred learning were formed, where the traditions were preserved and elaborated; a complicated and protracted apprenticeship or noviciate was devised. The Brahmins, in speculating on the sacrifice—which ever tended to change from being an oblation and a contract (*do ut des*: "I give that you may give") into a practically magic rite—could not but go on to speculate on the dead, on the gods, and the order of the universe. Either compelled by sheer logic, or under the influence of circumstances, they ended by realizing many things, and in chief (*a*) that the traditional gods were not really sovereign beings, independent and distinct each from the other, as had hitherto been believed; and so each one after the other, from a very early date, came to be adorned with all the attributes and all the power of his fellows. This is Henotheism, the cult of a god, as God, without excluding the recognition of other Gods equally believed in. Monotheism



of a certain sort, at any rate, may prove the ultimate goal of this process of fusion, and indeed Supreme Gods have so been fashioned. But here the result was quite other: the gods are thought to hold their divinity from a superior God, Brahmā or Vishnu or Hiranyagarbha, the "Germ of Gold" blossoming on the primordial waters; but what can this God be save the infinite and impersonal Force which develops, gives life to, and ultimately reabsorbs the universe? Did this world issue from Being, from a personal First Principle? or from not-Being, universal, undifferentiated Force? Were the gods born before the world, or did they come after it? "He that is on high knoweth; and even He, knoweth He it indeed?"

The Brahmins, after their fashion (which is not that of Spinoza or of Hegel), delved deep into this problem of Essential Being. But a childish psychology, a mythological *mise en scène*, and ritualistic speculations mingled endless discordant images with their philosophy of existences. Still, gradually, and at any rate in certain groups of thinkers and at certain periods, the gods, in so far as they are distinct and transcendent beings, disappear behind the splendid but bewildering vision of the Brahmā (neuter).<sup>1</sup>

(b) Do the dead enjoy for all eternity the home of bliss whither sacrifices and other good acts have exalted them? The opinion soon sprang up that they will die again if they do not succeed in outpassing the world of contingencies and so reach eternal Brahmā. To return thus into the infinite Being is to attain indeed to absolute happiness, but it entails the utter stripping off of "Selfhood." The Brahmins in their eschatology tend "to sacrifice personality, which, for us, is the all-in-all of after-death subsistence" (Barth). From the dawn of Indian speculation this tendency is very marked. "He by whom man knoweth, how should He know Himself? There only where duality

<sup>1</sup> Brahmā, the supreme God, is masculine.



exists, can Consciousness exist. . . . After death, there is no more self-consciousness."

(c) The idea that the dead are to die again in order to live once more on earth is possibly an evolution from purely Vedic concepts (A. M. Boyer, *Oltramare*), but it is in perfect harmony with the savage belief in reincarnations. The most ancient Brahmins believed, as did the Indo-Europeans, that the father is born anew in his son, and never did they wholly abandon the old dogma of the Family, even when they admitted transmigration. The Hindus apparently imagined, and so the Buddhists assure us, that generation implies not alone the normal process, which is not indeed invariably necessary, but the presence of some human or at least animal being, disincarnate, but anxious for reincarnation. Such is actually the belief of certain contemporary Australian tribes.

Now the Brahmins had thought that souls mounted towards the sun, to descend thence in the form of rain, then food, then seed, when they did not merit to pass beyond the sun and any new death. They further saw that any reincarnation was possible only according to a law: the new life could not but be either recompense or punishment: and upon the older and almost savage superstition they superimposed a moral and cosmological philosophy; beings, from all eternity, pass from existence to existence, being now gods, now men, now animals, and now damned.

Transmigration was considered as essentially painful: first, because the sum of suffering in the seen and unseen worlds, in earth and hell, infinitely outweighs the sum of joys; next, because the return into Brahmā, and the emancipation from new death, immortality, appeared the ideally perfect Good.

(d) It accordingly seemed evident, to certain groups, that marriage and funeral ceremonies were relatively useless, since no essential connection need exist between father and son. Sacrifice and good works can but win a fleeting pleasurableness in reincar-

nations to which a man may be destined; but the essential thing is to become united to Brahmā, towards which nothing that is contingent can lead.

Often, therefore, Brahmins, after fulfilling the obligations of human life, "when their hair grows white and they have seen their son's son," will leave their homes to dwell as wandering mendicants or anchorets, offering a wholly interior sacrifice, seeing Brahmā in all things, and all things in Brahmā, striving to rid themselves of that ignorance which hides from the eyes of the soul the true and only Reality.<sup>1</sup> Some of them meditate on Brahmā as "qualified," that is to say, as God; others immerse themselves in the contemplation of the pure Existence, considering the universe as a sort of wizard play of the Supreme Being; all are agreed that the world is but a phase, in itself painful, of the uncreated light, and that the breath which animates us is but an emanation, a pseudo-personality of Brahmā. But it is not the Brahmins alone who take these steep ways to salvation: many a member of the feudal nobility (Kshatriyas), whence the heads of Orders like the founder of the Jāinas (Jina) and of the Bauddhas (Buddha) were to rise, were as fervent. And again, in the taste for asceticism which, in all these forms of religion, underlies speculation, the line of demarcation between what is Hindu and what genuinely Brahmin is hard to trace: many of these penitents were in search less of immortality than of magic powers. We cannot forget, without courting false conclusions, that Brahmin speculation and asceticism developed in a pagan environment.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lect. XII. II.

<sup>2</sup> On *Vedism* and *Brahminism* a résumé and bibliography will be found in two short volumes by the present writer, published by Bloud, Paris, 1908-1909. See also Barth, *Religions of India* (Trübner, Oriental Series); Hopkins, *Religions*; Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (tr. by A. S. Geden; Edinburgh, 1906). The general conception of this book appears to me, however, at fault. See Thibaut, *Vedāntasūtra, Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxxiv., Introduction.

## II. BUDDHISM

At a period placed, with hesitation, by most scholars in the middle of the sixth century B.C., a young man belonging to the sub-Himalayan clan of the Śākya, and of the family of Gotama, and contemporary, thus, with Confucius,<sup>1</sup> set out, like so many others, in quest of immortality. After passing from master to master, and practising the most appalling austerities, he imagined, again like many another, that he had found the key to the problem, and proclaimed himself *Buddha*, that is to say, *Enlightened*. He formed about himself a group of ascetics. "Founder thus of a religious order, he knew also how to charm the masses" (Senart): alongside of his inner circle of disciples were to be found numerous admirers, "devotees," or lay adherents. The disciples were recruited not merely from among the crowd of religious to whom he could succeed in demonstrating his personal and doctrinal pre-eminence. We cannot possibly explain his immense success save by assigning it to those mysterious reasons which are responsible for the magnetism of great men. From such far distances the echo of his words returns, that we cannot but rank him among the greatest heroes of history. Unfortunately, a loyal criticism will not suffer us to form more than conjectures upon his personal life and actual doctrine. We can, however, quite easily group into coherent form most of the features of ancient Buddhist thought and organization.

1. Buddhists believe in survival, transmigration, and retribution of man's actions in this life or in a future life which shall be celestial, human, or infernal. They did not, as we see, invent this dogma, but we must notice that, first, when the Buddha says "act," or "action," he essentially means the act which is *Thought*; while according to the Jāinas, followers of the Jina and rivals

<sup>1</sup> Lect. II. pp. 11 *seqq.*



of the Buddha, an action, if we disregard the *intention* of the agent, is in itself a sort of subtle and indestructible *matter*. Second, that the doctrine of Action as deciding the character of the next life is taught in old Brahmin scriptures, but is there considered as a "secret," and the peculiar esteem in which the Buddha holds the Jātilas, ascetics who adore fire, and who are dispensed from making any noviciate, "because they believe in the doctrine of Action," seems to imply that the doctrine was anyhow not widely spread. Third, the "action" which the Buddha has in view is pre-eminently the *moral* act. He adopts, we readily confess, a formula of the Jātilas anathematizing those who deny the benefits accruing from sacrifice; but an immense preponderance of evidence proves that he holds the mere ritual action as far inferior. The Brahmins, on the other hand, continued believing sacrifices, whether to the Gods or to the Fathers, to be absolutely indispensable. The Brahmin ethic, formed round the domestic hearth, is, as we might well have expected, more wide and more human than the Buddhists'; to the latter, however, must indisputably be assigned the merit, if merit it be, of having almost entirely rationalized all ethics, and, by disentangling morality from religious or superstitious notions, and by connecting it with a rigorous conception of retribution, of having given to some of its precepts—those that forbade Theft, Lying, Murder, Adultery, Alcohol—a singularly powerful sanction. Fourth, the gods, according to the Brahmins of certain schools at any rate and at certain periods, had acquired their godhood by sacrifices, penances, and other virtuous acts: they are not eternal: not only, indeed, at the end of the cosmic period, all will return into aboriginal chaos, but a god can come into existence in the midst of the onflow of time. However, this theogony, or god-making on a basis of merit, remains among the Brahmins a mere theory, admitting some sort of reconciliation with the dogma

of the supreme God "incarnate" in Brahmâ, Śiva, and Vishnu. In Buddhism, however, the theogony is everywhere present and recognized, whence comes a progressive degradation in the view taken of the gods, who are inferior not merely to a Buddha, but even to a truly virtuous and wise Buddhist. Finally, neither Brahmins nor Buddhists are perfectly consistent in the dogmatic system built up around the notion of Act. Room has to be found for the idea of fate, for the influence of ancestors, for the infectious character of sin, for the graces of a god or a Buddha.

2. The Brahmins admitted as valuable, and even at times held as necessary, to achieve immortality (in Brahmâ), the life of religious, mendicant, or anchorite; but this road to salvation lay open only to members of the higher castes, and of these, only to those who had fulfilled the obligations of ordinary life; sacrifice, that is, and marriage. These two laws, however, admitted of exceptions: every religious, by becoming "a man of salvation," was freed from limits of caste; whatever his origin, a saint was always respectable! And, again, the young Brahmin was permitted to spend all his life as a "student" in his master's house, observing strict celibacy. Buddhism condemned the whole theory of marriage, though its lay followers could at least accumulate, as a rule, by non-sin and giving alms to monks, such merits as should obtain for them a happy reincarnation in which they would have opportunities of becoming monks. Buddhism also infused a freer spirit into the question of caste. But in practice, of these two points, marriage and caste, only the first proved important.

3. Before the Buddha, many heads of Orders had organized religious life on the Brahminist model, in imitation of the rules of the life of a Brahmin student, intermingling with this, however, many Hindu practices. Most of these Orders gave an important, indeed predominant, place to penance. The Buddha is held to have created an intermediate way of

life between the sensuality of ordinary life in the world, and the exaggerated asceticism of the naked ascetics and their like. But, as a matter of fact, Buddhism included two sorts of religious: "sedentary" or "conventual" monks, who took too much of nothing, but suffered themselves to lack nothing; and the "foresters," who were penitents in the strict sense, and slept at the foot of a tree, without shelter or fire. The former class is by far the more important, and we can but admire the arrangements—not all indeed original—which the Buddhist confraternities made to ensure morality and an exalted spiritual life in these mendicant brothers. Noviciate; fortnightly reunion for the reading of the book of the rules and for confession; precepts bearing on the work of asking alms, on meals, on life within the convent during the rainy season, on clothes, on the way of travelling during the fine season,—all this and more was in practice. Nor must it be forgotten that the "foresters" may in no way mutilate their bodies, nor adopt any of the morbid exaggerations of Hindu asceticism; even nudity, as practised by the Jāinas, is forbidden them, as also the vow of silence; and, *a fortiori*, thaumaturgy, at least in theory. The life of the Buddhist religious does not entail any law of obedience, but expects obedience to the law, *i.e.* chastity, concord, frugality: abstinence from flesh meat is not enjoined upon him; nor is there any law of work; indeed, work is prohibited: nor any law of poverty, at least in regard of the Order as a whole. As for the individual monk, his material living is, in practice, ensured to him by the alms which, at least from time to time, he must go and collect, by the offerings to and reserve funds of the convent, and by charitable hosts who may ask him in to dine. His intellectual life includes much meditation, hypnotic and even ecstatic exercises, which are indeed common property to all the sects and some of them of immemorial antiquity.



4. What is the object of this monastic life? In one word, Immortality. The good folk who observe the Pentologue (see p. 8), and give food to the monks, obtain thus the certainty of not going to expiate their sins in hell, and even of reincarnation in fortunate—indeed, it may be divine—conditions. These are advantages by no means to be condemned. But by this worldly road alone they can never pass beyond the cycle of transmigrations. The Brahmins believed exactly the same in regard of the fruit of good works and sacrifices. Clearly it was but perishable: according to them, only they who adored the Brahmā “in truth” were to reach eternal salvation. Similarly, those alone who have learnt from the Buddha the truth about salvation, and who, under his direction, practise the “renunciation,” the so-called “rule of Brahmā” (*Brahmacarya*), that is to say, only the monks, enter upon the road which leads to deliverance.

But as to the metaphysical account of “Brahmā,” a pantheist God, or an All-God, or Supreme God, the Buddhists do not feel satisfied. Though nothing could be harder than to reduce their doctrines to a coherent system, yet on many points we can regard ourselves to have attained moral certainty.

Less even than the Brahmins do Buddhists hold to Personality. Immortality, or emancipation from Transmigration, is called Refreshment, *Nirvāna*. It is *not* annihilation. But it is no known or imaginable form of existence. We must force ourselves to accept our data such as they are: *Nirvāna* is *not* annihilation, but even less is it a beatific *existence*. Evidently we are here face to face with a notion which, for us, will ever remain fundamentally alien and incomprehensible. In Brahmin philosophy we can, after all, understand that the return to, nay, *into* the Supreme Being, is absolute bliss, even though personality lose itself therein like a drop of water losing itself in the ocean. But the Buddhists deny this Supreme Being; their *Nirvāna* is neither a place nor a state; they

heap argument on argument to prove that Nirvâna is a pure emptiness, the end of the activity of thought. From the standpoint of our logic, and according to any rigorous scheme of deduction such as ours, this would mean sheer nothingness. And yet, so to translate the word *Nirvâna* would be, according to the opinion of many competent Indianist scholars, a blunder which would vitiate our whole interpretation of Buddhism. Let us loyally recognize that the Hindu mind possesses a "category"—a form of thought—which in ours is lacking.

The *Nirvâna*, then, or Immortality, or the Further Shore, or Home Unshaken, or Island, or Deliverance from Pain, is the *raison d'être* of the whole Buddhist way of life. It is to reach Nirvâna that a man becomes a monk.<sup>1</sup>

5. What, then, is the way, or path, or "vehicle" for reaching the Nirvâna? Simply this: Absence of Desire.<sup>2</sup> Buddhists prove that everything which happens to us is the necessary result of our former actions performed in some past life: by a legitimate induction, they argue that all the acts of *this* life must therefore reach maturity and bear fruit in a future yet to be. Now, whatever be this life—even divine—we must shun it: for the gods themselves are unhappy, foreseeing their imminent fall. To avoid new birth, a man must refrain from action; or rather from the act which proceeds from or leads to Desire. Hence the method followed by the Jâinas—suicide by starvation—sins against good sense: for it proceeds from the desire of being free from the misery of life, and will, in consequence, lead the suicide into some hell or heaven. The Buddha therefore traced laws which should enclose the life of his monks in a fine network of moderate mortifications, of tranquillizing, almost soporific meditations, eminently favourable

<sup>1</sup> For another way of regarding the Nirvâna, see below, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> So far, this is pure Brahminism, if we replace the word Nirvâna by Brahmâ, Supreme or Undifferentiated Being, 0 and ∞.

to peace, renunciation, and absence of desire. It is from the fundamental principle of Retribution following on all actions that this further principle of non-desire and non-action logically proceeds; and similarly, a rule of life which facilitates and engenders the extinction of desire.

6. But Buddhists are far from simply holding that life is not worth living; that things are as though they were not; that our Ego, doomed to passion and suffering, is hateful; in a word, that all is vanity, and that a man must renounce himself: they transport all these negations from the moral sphere, where it may well be they first arose (Senart), into the realm of metaphysics and psychology. On the one hand, they brand as heretics all who teach annihilation after death; for, say they with much good sense, if a man denies a future life, he is bound either to fall into despair, or to abandon himself to pleasure and to passion: he will heap high his sins; he will damn himself. On the other hand, they hold as indispensable for successful meditation the recognition of the non-existence of what can be called the Ego. On this Ego the Brahmins were not of one mind. Some (the Sâmkhyas) admitted the existence from all eternity of individual beings united to a "subtle body," possessing by this union some degree of intelligence, and transmigrating till such time as they should attain to ultimate solitude, deprived for the future of all awareness, and sheltered from all pain. The rest, who set the tone for orthodoxy, believed that the Ego, or "breath" (*âtman*), participated in the being of the Supreme Being (*brahmâ*), and by its union with individualistic actions and contingencies was subjected to all the pains of transmigration. For both schools, it will be seen, the true nature of the Self transcends the body, sensation, and thought: the psychological complexus envelops a unique substance, or even the supreme substance, without modifying it, but finding in it a kind of support. The Buddhists,



on the other hand, or at least the great majority, taught that sensations, acts, and thoughts, etc., are all self-existent, while there is no *being* existing which thinks, feels, and acts. Convinced partisans, as they are, of Transmigration, they stoutly deny the existence of any being with transmigrates. They are never wearied of denouncing the folly of those who, while still believing in a Self, hope ever to achieve deliverance. "It is even more foolish to consider Thought as the Self than to call the body a Self. For, after all, the body can live to be a hundred years old, while the thought perishes from moment to moment." "While we believe in the Self, we love the Self, we hate the enemies of the Self, we muse on the past and the future of the Self: clearly we cannot eradicate Desire as long as we believe in the substantial existence of the Self; and nothing is less reasonable than so to believe therein."

7. To this contradictory doctrine of the non-existent yet transmigratory Self must be added another, still more disconcerting. *Nirvâna*, as we have said, is a return into Brahmâ from which Brahmâ has been eliminated, and described in terms which are familiar to the Brahmins in their account of man's last end and deliverance from suffering. Yet a great number of texts exist which lead us to conceive of the *Nirvâna* not as an indescribable Beyond, but as the calm of the monk, exempt from all desire, peacefully awaiting death. Of the serenity of a monk who has arrived at this high degree of "ataraxia" or of quietism, and to whom is given the name *arhat*, we might say that he has the *Nirvâna*-on-earth, the foretaste and sure pledge of the true *Nirvâna*: for the *arhat*, once dead, will never live again: and further, that his is the "*Nirvâna* (or refreshment) from the fire of passion," as opposed to the *Nirvâna* of after-death, "refreshment from the fire of existence." But we have here more than a mere paradox or metaphor: complete detachment from

all earthly things in the midst of all the special advantages of a monastic life, and fragrant, as it were, with ecstasies, appears to the Buddhist (according to many documents at any rate) as the Good-in-Itself: and it is difficult—desirous as one may be to avoid this conclusion, and attractive as may be the arguments to the contrary—to refrain from recognizing in Buddhism a school highly disdainful of metaphysics and highly sceptical as to any future life, the value of Action, Transmigration, or of the final End. I doubt, however, whether these tendencies of Buddhist psychology deserve to be entitled doctrines: still, they undeniably exist, and certainly call for notice.

8. We must give up all hopes of understanding Buddhists if we do not diagnose in them what Barth has frankly called a "cerebral paralysis": this alone can explain their contradictions, both in the intellectual and in the sensitive fields. Most metaphysical systems contain antinomies: Brahminist philosophy does not arrive at harmonizing its doctrines concerning universal being and individual being—good, evil, happy or unhappy: the deists (*aiśvarikas*), who assert a sovereign and merciful God, and yet fail to obtain any clear idea of a being created and yet free, and indeed admit a deterministic "premotion" of the creature by God, are sore put to it to explain the existence of hell: ourselves, we can only elude the solemn antinomies of these problems by distinguishing the time for believing from that of judging, and by a severe application of methodical logic: we hold the ends of the chain, acquired truths, in spite of the fact that many of the intermediate links are invisible. But, as an Indian scholar has said, "the contradictions of Buddhism are not only radical, which I would forgive (and understand), but they are brutal, and unaware in their very brutality": they are, moreover, so to say, useless, for the life of renunciation, the way to *Nirvāna*, which is the essential part of Buddhism, is almost

identical with the object of the Brahmin panegyrics, and could easily be reconciled with their principles.

Here there exists, nor can we deny it, a genuine enigma, for on many points the Buddhists prove themselves good enough dialecticians. To solve it, we have, I think, a choice between two hypotheses.

A. The first rests upon a number of texts which indicate the possibility of an "intermediate path" between the affirmation and negation of personality, between the belief in annihilation in the *Nirvāna* and in eternal existence in the *Nirvāna*. The Buddha, when he was inquired of by his disciples, anxious to know exactly what he thought about the matter, and driven literally to bay, answered thus:—

"I teach an intermediate way. I condemn the opinion which distinguishes between the subject and the sensation—the Self and the psychic Phenomenon—and also the opinion which declares that the subject is not other than the Sensation. . . . He who believes in survival in the *Nirvāna*, and he who denies survival in the *Nirvāna*, both alike I condemn. You have no cause to weary yourselves over such problems. You must distinguish between the questions which I solve and those which I refuse to explain to you. What is it that I will not explain to you? Problems which are of no avail unto salvation, and which you could not seek into without falling into appalling errors. What do I explain to you? Necessary knowledge: that is, that existence is painful; that existence is produced and renewed from life to life by desire; that man may be delivered from existence; but only by deliverance from desire."

These are the "Four Noble Truths," or rather, the "Four Truths of the Nobles," *i.e.* the Buddhists.

We may therefore believe, and elsewhere I have laboured to point out, the advantages of this hypothesis, that the Buddha maintained an essentially pragmatic attitude. He knew that he would save creatures from new births (in which he believed with all his soul) to lead them to *Nirvāna* (in which he believed also, but without understanding it, for by its very definition it is ineffable), if only he could disgust them with desire—that is, desire of pleasure, of existence, of non-existence. As doctor of the fever



which is named Desire, he employs, in his treatment, allopathic remedies. "There is no personality: hence do not wish to become rich or a god. There are new births; so, if you commit sin, you will burn in hell or be reborn as ghost or earth-worm." *Nirvāna* is not existence: do not therefore desire *Nirvāna* as you might a paradise; that is the surest way of never getting there. *Nirvāna* is not non-existence; so do not go doing good actions, and apply your merits to possess celestial nymphs in the heaven of Indra or of Brahmā! *Nirvāna* is far better than all that!—The Buddha therefore appears to have taught a sort of agnosticism, limited, however, to problems touching the essential nature of things; while his disciples pushed his nihilist doctrines to their logical extremes, which they then hailed as true; for such negations he did indeed recommend at times, as conducive to the suppression of desire and to hygiene.

However, albeit this explanation appears admirably coherent, it is very far from being inevitable. If such had indeed been the Master's mind, would he not have revealed it—not indeed with more force, for he certainly expresses himself in this sense, and not seldom, with all imaginable energy and lucidity—but with more consistency? For, to tell the truth, he often loses it from sight, and the texts in which it is preponderant, considerable in themselves, are yet of but little bulk in relation to the mass of the scriptures, that is, if we compare them with the passages which positively deny personality, or prove such denials, and *eo ipso*, nor merely implicitly, make of the *Nirvāna* the mere dissipation of the fleeting elements of the unsubstantial Self.<sup>1</sup>

We must in all loyalty conclude that the doctrine of the "middle road between negation and affirmation" is a phase of Buddhist belief, may serve as a fixed point for the systematizing of a coherent body

<sup>1</sup> In this extremely obscure matter, it might be argued that the texts relating to the inanity of the Ego are but apocryphal interpolations.

of doctrine, and was, quite probably, taught by the founder himself (for it is wholly improbable that it was a sheer invention of his "nihilist" and "dogmatizer" disciples, as they are on the whole); but that we dare not, from the point of view of dogma or of history, regard it as the root or foundation of Buddhism.

B. The second hypothesis has one serious drawback. It tends to deny the authenticity of the scriptures.<sup>1</sup> Just as the philosophical scriptures of old Brahminism (the *Upanishads*) were elaborated in different schools, form divers traditions, and were finally promoted as a whole to the dignity of revealed matter; just as, in spite of their obvious anachronisms and contradictions, they present an indisputable family likeness—the same preoccupations concerning immortality; the same audacious speculations upon the *Brahmā*, and upon the roads which lead thereto, and so on—even so the speculations which, developed in a highly stylized diction, constitute the Buddhist scriptures, must, it is argued, have seen the light at different centres, have been codified and canonized as "Words of the Buddha" by the divers groups of ascetics or of thinkers who claimed to be clients of *Sākya*muni. A notable feature of Buddhist speculation, even where it touches on the same subjects, is its opposition to Brahmin speculation: *Brahmā*, the supreme God, is treated with very little consideration by the Buddha, who pitilessly ridicules the worshippers of *Brahmā*, for being ignorant of the nature of their God.

To the transcendent natural philosophy of the Brahmins, the Buddha opposes a theory of the production of pain which may indeed at the outset have been merely that,<sup>2</sup> but which contains, and not alone in germ, a theory of Becoming, freed from all notion of substance (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This theory flaunts

<sup>1</sup> For reasons impossible to set out here, we confess that we are for believing, at least in the broad sense, in their authenticity.

<sup>2</sup> As P. Oltramare, in his *Deux Causes* (Geneva, 1909), has with much shrewd originality pointed out.

itself all through the scriptures as an unparalleled and fundamental discovery. Yet the Buddhists, by proclaiming that all existence is pain, merely insist on the Brahmin view, that the Contingent and the Painful are identical: still, they speak as if this too were a discovery of the Buddha. In a word, even where it borrows, Buddhism sets itself in deliberate opposition to Brahminism. And we may believe that this frenzy for denying—destined to lead not alone to the denial of the Sufferer, but also of Pain, not alone of the Substance, but also of the Phenomena—was nourished by the exigencies of controversy. The controversial spirit may well explain many of the contradictions of the older Buddhism.

9. But we cannot reflect too deeply on the profound observation of Barth, that Brahmins and Buddhists are brothers albeit they theoretically hate one another: that the Buddhist *Sûtras* and Brahmin *Upanishads*—stylized and sententious; profound but unsystematic respectively—breathe often the self-same spirit of a mystical life, remote from all materialism, haughtily moral, but disastrously tending towards ecstasy and “meditation void of content,” without which man can attain neither to Brahmā nor to *Nirvāna*. The ancient schools of Buddhism, divergent often on metaphysical points (some even believe in personality), and the equally divided Brahmin schools—monists, theists, atheists, devotees—are all, practically, at one on the holy life which leads to salvation.

Strange and paradoxical as it may appear, the doctrinal opposition within Buddhism and Brahminism, and of the one to the other, has rightly been compared, not to the struggles which, in the West, existed and exist between believer and unbeliever, orthodox and heretic, but to those which were found between the various Catholic congregations—Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits. The questions whether there is, in or under the psychological complexus, a “person”; whether the world is governed by a Lord (*īśvara*), ruler



if not creator of the universe ; if the Deliverance be a happy life or ultimate repose,—have a bearing analogous, in practice, to the discussion on Universals or on Physical Premotion. From the merely logical standpoint, if either of the opposing theses is pushed to its ultimate results, disaster is the consequence, and irreparable mental divorce. But, with the exception of a few individuals, the Western schools of which we spoke could remain orthodox ; and *a fortiori*, in India—where there is not, and never could be, any orthodoxy—Buddhists and Brahmins remain really brothers, drawing their life from the same source of mysticism, the same hypnotic formulæ, the same aspirations towards perfect bliss by way of renunciation.

On the fundamental point they are, therefore, in harmony : they anathematize sceptics who deny the after-life or transmigration, heaven and hell. And notice, once the doctrine of transmigration is admitted, the greatest freedom of speculation on Being, Soul, God, is possible. It may be said that the question of the existence of God has, among ourselves, no little of its importance from the fact that we closely connect with it that of our last End. The Indians share in this point of view absolutely not at all : be there or be there not a personal God, we shall eat of the fruit of our acts, and we shall attain to the perfect bliss of final deliverance by asceticism and true knowledge. Similarly, the question of our own personality is chiefly important for us, from the consideration that if man is, as materialists will have it, a mere series of sensations, of thoughts without substratum, death is clearly the end of any self there is. The Indian schools, even the Buddhist (at least originally), remained very close to the old animist belief : the soul which transmigrates is for them no spiritual principle, no transcendent “noumenon,” but a subtle duplicate of the body and of the energizing psychological organism—a wraith. For the Buddhist, it matters not at all, in practice,

whether this organism exists as a whole in itself or be complex: our body and thought no doubt change from moment to moment, yet remain the same, as child and adult are the same, though utterly different. Exactly this is the relation of the Being existing in this life with the reincarnate Being, though death have intervened. The problem of the existence of a God (who is denied by all Buddhists) and of that of a substantial personality (which is denied by the majority) are mere triflings of a theological description, without importance in the practical or spiritual life, bitterly as they may be discussed.

10. Though they deny God, Buddhists cling to the gods. To a metaphysic which could give points to those of our best equipped of sceptics,<sup>1</sup> they ally a mythology not much better than those of savages, such as is, in fact, that of the ordinary Hindu. Gnomes, nymphs, vampires, demons, moral and kindly Gods, beings malignant to those who do not win their favour by gifts, or have no talisman to counteract their ill-will—nothing of this is excluded. The monks saw to that—partly for their own sakes, far more for that of their clients. For lay-folk and ordinary Buddhists, the important thing in life is to live it out comfortably; the gods help one here not a little; and also to win a new birth in some paradise (*svarga*) of “moderately quintessential joys.” The Buddha insists often and much on the joys of heaven, the pains of hell, and exact retribution. He condemns the Hindu gods who reject his Pentologue; he or his successors have certainly adopted measures well suited to keep superstition at a fairly low state of thought and emotion,<sup>2</sup> at least in the Order of monks.

11. We must here touch on a problem as important as obscure and variously solved. In later Buddhism,

<sup>1</sup> Their theory of Becoming in terms of Causes is, taking it all in all, a *chef d'œuvre*.

<sup>2</sup> The vile flood, too, of Hindu demonology—Tantrism—overwhelmed Buddhism as it overwhelmed Brahminism.

just before or contemporaneously with the beginning of our era, the personality of the Buddha himself came to dominate the whole scheme of Buddhist dogma and piety. Śākyamuni was magnified, deified: sublime beings were invented, in the past and in the present, themselves Buddhas, and constituting a peculiar sort of polytheism. Simple folk hoped for a new birth in some Paradise (e.g. *Sukhāvati*, or Happy Land) where quasi-eternal Buddhas (e.g. *Amitābha*, "infinite light"; by another name *Amitāyus*, "infinite life"; the Amīto of the Chinese, and a centre in China of a practically monotheist cult) sit on thrones, and whither devotees are carried by the grace of great saints, Buddhas to be, e.g. Avalokiteśvara, the Chinese Kwan-Yin: sages and spiritual folk proposed to become Buddhas themselves throughout endless series of lives of charity and meditation. We have reason to think that at a period far nearer the origins, certain sects believed Śākyamuni to be a magical apparition of a true Śākyamuni who had never left his heaven, where he reigned in a profound and serene meditation—the destiny of all perfect beings in possession of true knowledge. Finally, the oldest layers of Buddhist literature, the Pāli texts, consider Śākyamuni now as a man, a doctor in philosophy, a preacher of parables, and now as supernatural in essence, and relate his anterior existences. He is known to have descended from heaven, fully conscious, into the womb of Māyā; his body was marked with extraordinary symbols which are found, too, on some solar gods of Brahminism; before him other Buddhas had arisen, and revealed the same truths, and founded the self-same Order. And we are sure that from the very outset a cult of the relics of Śākyamuni was instituted, though the monks held themselves at first aloof from this.

Undoubtedly we must give a large place in the history of nascent Buddhism to the personality of its founder, and the impression he made on crowds of simple folk by no means preoccupied with *Nirvāna*



and the philosophy of Being. Though, to judge by the older literature taken as a whole, we must judge of Śākya-muni as a man who has reached a detachment to which all can aspire, and who is on the brink of entering that Nirvāna which is the common lot; though "all cult of adoration be contrary to the fundamental principle of Buddhism" (Senart), and though Śākya-muni, once passed away, "invisible to gods and men," be certainly out of all relation with his faithful; yet, as discoverer of the truth of salvation and the supreme manifestation of all its virtues, he possessed among the monks a prestige which it is hard to measure and reconcile with the dogma of his final disappearance. To enter into the way of Deliverance, *i.e.* to become truly a Buddhist, a man must have recourse to the Buddha, to the doctrine he preached, to the confraternity he founded. The cult paid to the Buddha—chiefly an offering of flowers—has a funerary character (A. M. Boyer): the commemoration of the Buddha, parallel to the "commemoration of the Doctrine," has no touch of divine worship in it, but has still less likeness to the cult by Lucretius of the idealized Epicurus, his master in philosophy. Even in the case of a monk profoundly convinced of the non-existence of the Buddha in the *Nirvāna*, we must never forget the gulf which separates the Eastern from the Western mind. The Buddhist scholastic attributes to the meditation on the vanished saint an influence which puts passion to flight, and prepares the way for the peace, the silence of sense and thought, which is the Nirvāna-upon-earth; and that without any intervention of the saint himself. No matter if he be no more in relation with his faithful: they are in relation with him, and "pacify" themselves in him. There is sincere fervour in the cult of the dead Buddha.

On the other hand, the Buddha's converts—Vishnuite ascetics, fire-worshippers, etc.—brought into the confraternity pious cravings, mythologies, speculations of all sorts, to which the strict doctrine had no

answer to make, though it did not forbid them. No doubt the lay-devotees, merchants or kings who looked after the funeral expenses, tended to adoration more readily than the intellectualist Brothers. To their influence doubtless was due the master's apotheosis and the mythological guise in which his legend, probably soon enough, decked itself out. For many Hindus, some time or other, the Buddha became a great god; the greatest of all, for the Buddhists. To the relic-cult was added that of symbols representing him, noticeably solar in character; last of all came image-cult. Western artists gave their services: in North-West Indian bas-reliefs and statuary a special and most curious chapter of the history of Greek art is to be read. Patronized in the land of its birth (Magadha=Patna) by King Asoka (third century B.C.), propagated by him throughout Hindustan and in Ceylon, Buddhism ultimately converted the semi-Turkish King Kanrishka (first century A.D.?) and thus entered Upper Asia. Just as the picturesque legend of the Buddha, his pre-existences (jātakas), so often seen in sculptures, and his final phase of life, had perhaps contributed more than anything else to the spread of his cult beyond the limits of the confraternity, so the rich statuary of North-West India, confirmed by the latest layers of the literature, proves that the peoples there adored, in the Buddhas, essentially benevolent, nay, merciful and loving gods, highly moral and by no means jealous. Popular Buddhism has always been strongly tinged with superstition.—Among the Buddhas we must mention Amitābha, thoroughly solar in character, and king of a realm situated near the sunset; elsewhere the sun himself is but a Buddha, burning, for the salvation of creatures, his body ever destined to re-birth.

12. We are constantly hearing of the compassion, pity, and charity which the Buddha is said to have held for a necessary virtue. Some have actually maintained that love of one's neighbour and com-

passion for suffering was the mainspring, the *raison d'être*, of Buddhism. Oldenberg has recently<sup>1</sup> shown that this is false. The Buddhist, fain to destroy in himself all desire, evidently becomes perfectly impassible when he definitely draws near to sanctity.<sup>2</sup> But one of the conditions of pacification of desire is a general benevolence, pouring out towards people in general, anonymous souls at the four points of the compass, a perfect, equable benevolence, which distinguishes neither parents, friends, nor enemies. However, into the egotistic complacency in which the monk is so glad to live, healthy, calm, and peaceable amidst men sick, anxious, and at strife, is infused an element of keen pity and tenderness for unhappy souls who are ignorant of the truth, which expresses itself in the significant words: "Thou must love all creatures as a mother loves her children." Again, the cenobitic life, and the relations which must exist between monks who are all "sons of Śākya," show how necessary is concord,<sup>3</sup> even affection: in the oldest literature even, fine passages exist: "Ye, O monks, have no mothers and no fathers to wait on you [when you are ill]. If ye wait not one upon the other, who is there indeed who will wait upon you? Whosoever would wait upon Me, he should wait upon the sick." And the Buddha, in contrast to other founders of sects, tells his lay clients to give alms not only to his own monks but to their rivals. This is remarkable and fine. Lastly, the Buddha's own character, his mission of saviour of the world by way of preaching, the belief that he had put off his own *Nirvāna* out of pity for this universal suffering which was the starting-point of his doctrine, and that his greatness was due to extraordinary works of charity and asceticism,

<sup>1</sup> *Deutsche Rundschau*, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> A husband turned monk says to his wife: "Though thou shouldst cast thy son to the jackals, thou shouldst not decide me, unhappy woman, to return for love of thy son!"

<sup>3</sup> The Buddha condemns discord and schism as capital crimes: he says explicitly that it is the *more reasonable* who must give in.



brought about the insertion in the biography of his earlier lives of a quantity of heroic incidents of self-sacrifice. Here, no doubt, the Buddhists have drawn from Indian folklore; but it is the glorification of compassion which they have chiefly sought for.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, in later Buddhism, many adepts renounced the acquisition of the *Nirvāna* in this life, and vowed to become Buddhas themselves for the salvation of the world. This new form is called the Great Vehicle, because it carries the soul not to an immediate, but to far distant, *Nirvāna*, passing through the mid-state of Buddha, and because it thus transports not monks alone but the married; and in this way Buddhism connected pity, as an indispensable means to salvation, as closely as it well could, with the worship of Buddhas and future Buddhas who had almost reached their goal and were already reigning with the Buddhas in paradises. Finally, recognizing the Buddhas as Heavenly Fathers, the faithful had a solid reason to love their neighbour: "The Buddhas, who are all compassion, have adopted all creatures as their real Selves . . . to honour creatures is to honour the Buddhas. To make creatures suffer is to make the Buddhas suffer. . . . Save by serving creatures, how shall we win pardon from the Buddhas?"<sup>2</sup> Here we have pity, or charity, properly so-called. But it especially consists in vowing to become a Buddha for the salvation of the world, for Buddhas alone can save; instead of entering at once into the *Nirvāna*,

<sup>1</sup> We may, however, prefer the Brahmin legend of the bride who by her own free death ransoms her husband from death, and many human and "sweetly reasonable" traits of Brahminism to the grotesque charity of the Sākyamuni to be, who gave his limbs, his wife and his children to a beggar; or, during his hare-incarnation, had himself roasted to make a meal for a Brahmin.

<sup>2</sup> Ancient Buddhism, on the other hand, tells how King Prasenajit said to his wife Jasmin: "Is there anyone thou lovest better than thyself?" "No: and thou?" "No one." The king and queen relate this dialogue to the Buddha. "Traverse the whole world," he said, "and one will find nobody to which anything is dearer than his Self: so too one's neighbour's Self is dear to him: so he who loves himself injures not his neighbour."

many a millennium of successive existences will have to be lived—happy, however, all of them; if mortal sin be committed, the sinner yet shall have a special hell, “au régime de la pistole” (Barth): and again, it consists in applying all one’s merits to the salvation of creatures, that they themselves may become Buddhas; and further, in practising the supreme gift of preaching, helping the unhappy, or brethren less well-off for alms, when one is a monk; if one is lay, in providing monks with food and endowing monasteries: finally, in offering painful gifts, one’s flesh and marrow, and even bones—though this seems to be pure theory, and in the opinion of reasonable folks the example of the future Śākyamuni, who had himself devoured by a tigress lest she should commit the awful crime of eating her own cubs, is not one to be followed.

13. In the rough we may say that we find in Buddhism, especially its later forms, many notions which recall Christianity—vows of chastity, confession, charity, and a condemnation of all forms of egoism: invocation of powerful saints, participation in their merits, etc.: but, even without taking into consideration the totality of the two systems, which are in flagrant contradiction, the very notions which appear most similar, are separated, when we analyze them, by the whole depth and width of the great gulf fixed between the European and the Hindu mentality. Yet though we may see in Buddhism these weaknesses, this incurable “cerebral paralysis” of its doctors, this debauch of mysticism, dialectic and myth, yet, in this chapter of the religious history of India, we must own to something very great. The Buddha was perhaps the earliest of India’s saviour-men; his monastic rule is very wise, and survives unchanged in a number of monasteries which it keeps at a very lofty level, moral, spiritual, and religious, and no doubt it has developed in the Hindu mind the notion of personal responsibility, of duty, of benevolence, and of gentleness.

For a Buddhist to think or to say, "May I, during all the periods of the Cosmos during which creatures die of hunger and thirst, be food and drink for all creatures," is infinitely more meritorious, and more useful, than to give a glass of water to any individual. To print horses on bits of paper and throw them to the winds, is, for the Lamas of Tibet, far more useful to the traveller, than to open to him the gates of the monastery. Buddhism is permeated with the most intense idealism: many schools assert that thought alone exists; others, that nothing exists; even thought is an illusion which shall expire in the *Nirvāna*. On the adoration of the Buddhas, on the practice of charity, these doctrines cannot but leave their impress. Reasonable as, in certain of its aspects, Buddhism may seem, sympathetic as may be the sincere piety of many of its writers, curious and touching as may be its legend, and however remarkable, from every point of view, its propagation, we must not forget that Buddhism arose amid penitents and devotees of ill-balanced brain, was developed in the heart of Hinduism, in the cloister, for the cloister, and by means of it. Hence, as a whole, its character is artificial, its literature thoroughly academic; it develops extravagantly a few commonplaces—pity, universal void, misogyny; its dialectic loves classification and hairsplitting; it issues into chill abstractions only. Buddhists have gone one better than any other Indian sect, except, in certain details, the Jāinas. Their hells are more complicated and grotesque than any other. It was they who invented the punishment whereby the tongue of the damned soul is dragged out over a dozen leagues to be torn in detail by demons; their charity can evolve the saint who, by multilocation, gets his corpse into every cemetery that every animal, by feeding on it, may merit a rebirth in the heavens of Buddhahood. And, in Buddhism, no rule of faith, no authority exists which may separate religions from pseudo-religions, and



mythological extravagances from the sane tradition.

To conclude, I detect in what I have said nothing which may strictly be called "apologetic." It is absurd to suppose that Christianity can be injured by comparing it to Buddhism; see Buddhism as it is, and you cannot dispute the superiority of Christianity. But let us carefully note that this superiority—at least to the extent to which a historian of religion is called upon to judge of it—is primarily that of the Western mind over the Hindu. Pythagoras taught that charity consisted in helping one's neighbour to shoulder his burden, not to carry it. A theologian, therefore, may demand from specialists an expert description of a pagan religion; but he will not ask to have pointed out what profit apologetics may derive therefrom.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "It was announced," writes Dr. Jordan (*Comparative Religion: its Genesis and Growth*, by L. H. Jordan, 1905, T. & T. Clark), "that there was a remarkable and fundamental similarity between Buddhism and Roman Catholicism: and this declaration was put forth in the name of Comparative Religion! All will remember how the science which was thus airily summoned as a witness, and which was thus relied upon to furnish the chief support of this theory, proved to be its most remorseless critic" (p. 411). Weber, Count Goblet d'Alviella, and others are of opinion that Christian writings were used by Buddhists to "enrich the Buddhist legend, just as the Vishnuites built up the legend of Krishna on many striking incidents in the life of Christ," and just as Syro-Greek art certainly gave a Christian aspect to much North-West Indian sculpture. "Buddhism is absolutely ignored in the literary and archaeological remains of Palestine, Egypt, and Greece. There is not a single ruin of a Buddhist monastery or *stupa* in any of these countries; not a single Greek translation of a Buddhist book; not a single reference in all Greek literature to the existence of a Buddhist community in the Greek world" (C. F. Aiken, *Buddhism*, in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, iii. pp. 32, 33). All testimony conspires to establish the independent growth of Buddhism and Christianity. It was therefore permissible to exclude from these pages, in which a description of the truth has been attempted, the unnecessary refutation of what is false. A most interesting correspondence between Professor Rhys Davids and Cardinal Newman on this subject may be read in Mr. W. S. Lilly's *The Claims of Christianity*, c. 2. pp. 25-36. And see the Introduction to *Bouddhisme: Opinions, etc.*, by the writer of this lecture, quoted in the Bibliography. The legend of ŚS. Barlaam and Josaphat is a Christian pious tale based on the legend of Śākyamuni. The examination of the thesis, that the Christian and Buddhist accounts, though developed independently, yet made use of identical and older folklore data, is too difficult to be attempted here.—Tr.

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Neo-Buddhism is, if I may be permitted to express my personal opinion, at once frivolous and detestable, and dangerous, perhaps, for very feeble intellects.