OBSTACLES ON THE PATH

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Abstract

Obstacles on the Path are the impediments which block all progress and even the entrance to the path of perfection. According to Buddhism the removal of those obstacles through insight rather than through effort opens new vistas of creative living in understanding and realisation. If one understands the bonds which bind us, one would be free.

Introduction

Listening to many sermons and scholarly expositions of the doctrine of the Buddha, all strictly adhering to his sayings in the Suttas and faithfully following the traditional commentaries, we have been left untouched and cold, as they lacked the life and fire of conviction and experience: It was the dust of dead words!

Has the Buddha's word no message for us in our living? Is it not possible to light up the darkness of others and bring some warmth in their hearts, without leading, without arguing, but merely by showing where we went wrong, where there are obstacles on the path, as each one carries his own light of understanding?

Do we have to kill Buddhism by dissecting it scholarly, surgically, unfeelingly? Does not our heart ever cry out with that *saṁvega* which is not a pain of conflict, but an aching tenderness, the regret of missed opportunities, of faulty failures, and the need to make amends?

The following thoughts were written down with that feeling after listening to such a scholarly symposium dealing with these same subjects: the ten fetters (*dasa saṁyojana*). If we understood the bonds which bind us, we should be free.

Henri van Zeyst
Kandy, September 1977.

Initial Impediments

In the course of these four chapters let us examine the various impediments which prevent us from achieving what we usually consider the goal of all our striving, and which very frequently prevent us from making even the slightest progress on that road to perfection. It is, of course, a very healthy sign when we are aware of our limitations, our impediments, the obstructions and hindrances which retard our progress so much that we call them fetters (*saṁyojana*). Some may not be aware, others may even find delight in the security of a cage; and nothing but a severe shock will then be able to rouse them from the lethargy of their existence.

But, discontent with existing conditions is like the bursting of a seed reaching maturity in order to send out its feelers, its roots, its shoot into an unknown world, other than self, and in that very process destroying itself as the lonely seed.

In these following pages we shall not interest ourselves in the hundred-fold fruit which is promised to those who die to themselves; but we shall try to find out the nature, the cause and the composition, first of all of those initial impediments which block the very entrance to the path of deliverance.

Later we shall talk of love and hate, those main driving forces which constrain, compel and restrict our relationship in this life of sense. Still later, we shall consider those subtle, sublimations of sensual pleasures in which the mind tries to escape the bondage of the flesh only to get caught in the finer meshes of the net of the intellect. And then we may attempt to understand the composition of those final spiritual impediments, the most subtle of all, the most tenacious, where neither mind nor body have a foothold, but which as an odour cling and cloy and permeate, penetrate, pervade and saturate every fiber of our being.

The initial impediments which prevent all progress, because they block the very entrance to the road, are three obstructions which essentially are very close; for, it is the delusion of separateness with its dual world-aspect, which naturally produces that perplexity and confusion which cannot be solved, and which, therefore, tends to a desire for escape.
Let us consider them one by one.

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The delusion of separateness or the misconception of individuality (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) is not self-consciousness. For, self-consciousness is an awareness of the actual process of action and reaction, which constitutes an individual existence in a process of physical growth and decay, of mental absorption and retention in memory, a process of wishing-to-obtain, and willing-to-achieve, a process of evolution dependent on the conditions of environment and heredity, a process of involution dependent on the loosening of those very factors which have created it. Conscious awareness of such a process will never lead to a delusion of separateness and can, therefore, never become the cause of a misconception of individuality. For, such conscious awareness will be a mental alertness to the arising and ceasing of conditions which can never produce delusion of a permanent entity, an abiding substance, an eternal soul. It is rather the absence of such awareness which allows the introduction of a desire for permanence within the process of impermanence (*anicca*), a desire for satisfaction within the process of conflict (*dukkha*), a desire for self within the process of an unsubstantial void (*anatta*).

Failing to see that we are moving with and are moved by the current of events, forming an integral part of that process in action and reaction, we wish to believe that we can be a spectator viewing life from the inside as if we were sitting in a room looking through a window at the passing show outside. Thus mentally and emotionally separating ourselves from the events outside, we form a concept of individuality which remains within, separate and untouched by those events. This provides that sense of security which we think cannot be assailed by the insecurity of the fleeting life without.

This is a view of individuality which is so innate in human nature, that continued existence of personality becomes impossible without it. And thus, all religions (with the only exception of Buddhism) have made this view of individuality the main dogma of their cosmology and theology. For, in a sense, the doctrine of an everlasting soul is more essential than any belief in the existence of God. If there is no soul, there is no need of salvation, no supernatural goal, no ethical sanction, no need of God. And this doctrine of an abiding entity as an individual soul has left its mark not only on moral theology, but even on natural philosophy and on sciences as physics and biology. Several idealist philosophers, famed in the history of the ages, postulate a no umenon as the bearer of all the changing

phenomena, in a way as many men of science accept a substratum as the physical base underlying the chemical changes, and as many biologists still search for that elusive entity which distinguishes life from death.

Of course, there are many materialists who do not consider the mind as something separate from the body. But are they right in reducing mental impressions to the simple level of chemical reactions? It is certainly true that matter, i.e. material objects and material impacts, form conditions on which depends the birth of thought. The grey matter of the brain together with the nervous system, linked to the physical external senses, form the necessary adjuncts by which the world of events is received, perceived and conceived as a thought. And yet, these same materials brought together artificially, i.e. outside a living organism, do not produce thought.

Denying on the one hand, therefore, that chemical reactions, al- though conditioning, are the cause of mental reactions, we also deny the independent existence of an entity which has a continued reality, apart from phenomenal actuality. It is this double denial which made the Buddha reject the doctrine of annihilation as well as that of eternalism. Annihilationism accepts a mechanistic world-view, in which even the actions of the intellect are mechanical responses to physical stimuli, without social responsibility, and without any means to control, to regulate, to guide such actions, if only to prevent a final catastrophe. In theory, this doctrine may have some followers, but in practice it becomes impossible through the inner conflict of contradictory elements.

Many, therefore, will free themselves from the rigid bonds which reduce man to a machine. But, in doing so, they run away too far in the opposite direction, by endowing a personal action with an individuality, free from its environment, not bound by time or space, a separate “I”-entity, a glorified “self”, which is thought of as a spiritual “soul” endowed with everlasting immaterial life. And that is the doctrine of eternalism, the misconception of individuality, which is the initial impediment, the chief obstacle which prevents even the entry on to the path.

This initial impediment is not only formidable because it is the first obstacle, but most of all because of its own inherent strength and composition. The obstacle is an artificial barrier, a dam, erected to hold back the flow of impermanence in which the "ego" cannot find a footing. An endeavour to force life to a stand-still thus creates a reservoir in which are stored the accumulating memories of the past. Without such retention of past experiences it is impossible to have any classification, any reference of the past to the present. But, while meeting the present with such a retention of the past, it is obviously impossible to have a full understanding of a new experience, which is then only judged, and compared with values which are no more. Then there will be no pure and fresh action which alone can be liberating; but there will be reaction to past conditions, which we call the *vipāka* to past *karma*. And that is the fetter (*saṁyojana*) which binds us to renewed becoming or rebirth in *Saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth and death.

It is this self-delusion, without which there cannot be a concept of a continued existence of an abiding entity. And without abiding entity, substance or soul, there will be mere change, a process of beginning and ceasing, of evolution and involution. And thus, the basis of a desire for continuation must be the concept of self-continuance. Without continuation of "self" any other continuation is without value, without meaning, without interest. Likewise, the understanding that this concept, this idea or view (*diṭṭhi*) is a misconception, is the most important and initial step towards full comprehension or enlightenment. This misconception of an abiding self-entity or soul naturally is a fixation which produces an opposition between the fixed and the impermanent. In this opposition there is friction or conflict between the desire for self-continuance and the universal fact of change and impermanence. And the mind, by means of memory, has created an image whereby the past can endure in the present. That image is the "ego", the "self", which has been made the proprietor of past action, so that the result of past action can be called "mine", long after the action has ceased. Thus we create a division between the actor and the act, in which the act can cease and the actor can continue. "I" become the owner of my deeds; but, when it is understood that the deeds make the doer, and when it is thoroughly grasped that when a deed ceases there cannot remain a doer (in a way as there is no walker any more when the act of walking ceases), then it will also be clear that

any separation, isolation or opposition between the actor and the act is entirely artificial not only, but even a hallucination and a delusion.

If then the so-called "self" is not seen as a separate entity it will be understood as a process of reaction to environment, a result of past projection, a creation of a desire for continuance And that is an obstacle and impediment on the way, truly comparable to a fetter, for it binds to the environment, to past experiences, to dead memories, which will not allow freedom of action in the present, freedom of thought for evolution, freedom from self in emancipation. Whereas, the understanding of this delusion will at once dissolve all division of separateness, all conflict of opposition, all desire for projection, and thereby provide the possibility of independent action, which alone is capable of leading to real freedom and deliverance.

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On the other hand, the delusion of separateness, which is the misconception of individuality as an abiding entity, is naturally the cause of a classification of opposites, based on the misconcepts of "self" and "other-than-self". Such a dual world-view is bound to lead to perplexity (*vicikicchā*), arising from not facing a problem in its entirety. Usually a problem causes a conflict either in the intellect or in the emotions. Or rather, it becomes a problem because it is viewed either in the intellect, or felt in the emotions. Whether one is guided by one's feelings, unchecked by understanding, or is led by reason, while disregarding the other mental states which produce worry or agitation, anxiety or fear of insecurity, it is not possible to grasp the situation fully, and any such partial dealing with a problem can only result in a psychological suppression, producing a state of indecision, mental paralysis or perplexity. This state of indecision is not a wholesome doubt or suspension of judgement, but a procrastination, which is a reluctance to face any issue, because it is feared that a solution of the problem may result in some upset of vested interests, in a discovery of some skeleton in the cupboard, in an obligation to pursue a way of life in which the security of the individual "self" may be threatened.

We cannot afford to be guided by our feelings and emotions alone, for that would be the surest way for the growth of egotism. But we cannot afford to ignore them either, for they show us our character, our composition, our strength as well as our weakness.

Perplexity, then, is a refusal of complete integration, based on fear of the unknown, that is, fear of loss of the known. There is the memory of the past, which may be far from perfect, but which at least is known, and to which we can attach some psychological value, as we do to the religion and the country in which we are born. Very rarely do we wish to break with tradition, even if we are aware of its limitations and restrictions, which are frequently more impeding than assisting our progress, material or spiritual. In other words, this impediment is the conflict between desire and fear, desire to obtain and fear to let go; we want to eat the cake and have it. It is not a mere understanding of their mutual exclusion which could solve this problem, for that might result in the choice of one, although with regret for the other. That would not be a solution, but an emotional escape. Then there will be a mental residue, which is hankering after the part we could not obtain, but which we hope to secure on some future occasion.

Only in the understanding of the basis of desire and the nature of fear, the conflict can be dissolved through the understanding of the initial impediment, the misconception of individuality. In perplexity we run away from the discomfort having to seek self-satisfaction elsewhere. We run away from transiency to look for an eternal truth, not realising that the whole significance of truth lies in the actuality of the transient. In perplexity we run away from the problem, in the hope that others may provide a solution in answer to our prayers and offerings, not realising that none can help us but ourselves. But by turning to others we only complicate the problem of duality, caused by our misconception of individuality, and thereby intensify the perplexity of conflicting thoughts and feelings.

If we then make a search for truth in such a perplexed state of mind, it is not possible to find a solution for a wholesome doubt; for, such a search will be merely an escape from the perplexity of the problem without trying to solve it by understanding. Then, this spirit of escape makes one study various religions and philosophies as systems, offering control and ethical conduct.

One may even adopt a religious life away from worldly conflict and accept a monastic asceticism as a way towards salvation, a way towards the goal, which some call God or Brahman, while others speak of Nirvāṇa. But all such search remains an escape as long as we search for the consolation of security, away from the insecurity of perplexity.

One cannot escape the insecurity of perplexity, as long as it is not understood that it is the conflict between desire and fear—as long as desire is not understood as a misconceived striving for the expansion and continuation of a deluded "self"—as long as fear is not understood as a painful emotion caused by a misapprehension of an impending danger of discontinuation, of insecurity, of non- existence. But when this concept of a permanent entity, in matter or in mind, as substance or as soul, is seen as a delusion by which to deceive ourselves in a desire for continued existence—then the basis for perplexity is gone, and there with a formidable impediment and obstacle on the road to mental growth, spiritual development and understanding of the truth—the truth that the "self" is but a process of action and reaction, arising on conditions of environment, subsisting on induced reasoning, and ceasing with the understanding of the total process of fear which repels, of desire which attracts in order to give substance to the body and a soul to the mind.

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Fear, which can mesmerise the mind into the inactivity of perplexity, may on the other hand also stampede the mind into a senseless activity of escape. Neither reason nor understanding have any truck with fear, and have therefore no dealings with perplexity or with panic. A panicky mind in a sudden alarm will grasp for support at anything within the reach of its imagination. Man's inborn herd-instinct makes him go to others for courage and assistance. That may be merely a search for confirmation of one's own opinion a corroboration of one's own standpoint, or a search for consolation, promise of security, sharing of sorrow.

But, whatever form it takes, it is always a search for sympathy, for congeniality, for a kindred spirit, which will calm down the panic of the troubled mind. Hence it is compared with a contagious disease (*parāmāsa*) and it can take many forms. Standards, systems, organisations have come into being, because of our demand for reliance, security and support. Standards of virtue and morality provide the occasions and the reasons for conformity in behaviour and ethical conduct. Here we feel safe within the moral codes of the great religions, and we attach ourselves to the rules of virtue (*sīla-vata*), which, instead of making us free from fear, bind us with this fetter. In the search for support we seek only ourselves; for, we go from teacher to teacher till we have found one whose views agree and coincide with ours, who therefore will strengthen our misconceived views of self-identity, on whom we can rely because he is an extension of our self-delusion. In prayer and sacrifice we attempt to bribe the gods to be on our side, as we would retain a lawyer to defend us. We rely on the authority of persons, of dogmas, of mantras, of religious performances, the authority of a sooth-sayer, of a horoscope, and most binding of all, on the authority of society. Fear of blame and a sense of shame (*hiri-ottappa*) have certainly a restraining influence and have therefore the strength of virtue. But, if that fear of public opinion shames us into actions which impede the free movement of understanding, we submit ourselves to the whims of a sick society, to the interpretations of a decaying faith, to the restrictions of a diseased mind, which seeks satisfaction rather than a cure.

In our search for, and reliance on, authority we seek the satisfaction of insurance in our craving for continued existence for permanence. And thus, for the premium of a certain amount of spiritual exercise we hope to buy heavenly bliss, forgiveness of sin, a short-cut to perfection. But that is only an attempt at escaping, without realising that we cannot escape from life without accepting life (as it is) to be our teacher. Life is conflict; therefore, do not run away from conflict in search of peace; for, in the understanding of the nature of conflict may lie its solution. The delusion that good deeds suffice to attain salvation is a moral corruption which affects the very roots of true living. As long as virtuous acts, meritorious deeds, religious practices, disciplinary regulations, spiritual exercises are valued as means for the acquisition of

a holy life—religions will only be commodities of commerce. Social service as a means of acquiring merit is not service for those in need, but an exploitation, because we use them, we abuse them, as a source of income and investment, profitable to ourselves.

If virtuous deeds are means to an end, then prayer and sacrifice are not better than a drug which provides a temporary relief from pain, a hallucination, an attempt to escape, without providing a cure. But, if life is understood fully as a conflict of irreconcilable interests, that is, between the desire for permanent satisfaction of "self" and the universal impermanent process without "self"—then there will be the understanding of the impossibility of an escape, because of the realisation of the unreality of the conflict. If there is no conflict, there is no need for escape, there is neither perplexity, nor panic. And there can be no conflict, if there is no opposition, if there is no delusion of an abiding individuality.

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And so these three initial impediments arise, stand and fall together as three sticks supporting one another, none of them having any independent basis. Yet, together they form a set of obstacles, which have to be removed for the natural unimpeded flow of life to continue its process towards its natural goal of losing itself in the ocean of deliverance. It is only the first step on the path, and this first step tells us that there is no walker. Much more understanding will be needed before the concept becomes a reality. More obstacles of love and hate, of sublimation of desire, will have to be removed, before the conceit of achievement, the impatience of sanctity and the basic ignorance of "self" will finally cease to block the road which leads to, and which is, the freedom of Nibbāna.

Love and Hate

Having cleared the first set of obstacles on the way, we are now firmly established on the path, even with a guarantee that the end is within reach, so to say. But, there is one thing never to be lost sight of: that there may be a road, but there is no walker on that road.

It reminds me sometimes of moving upwards on an escalator which is going down. All the movements of climbing are there, and each time I lift my foot to the next stop there is the impression of progress; but, as the escalator is moving down and disappears at the bottom altogether, my relative progress is nil. The comparison is, of course, very imperfect; but the reality is even worse. For, though the road is shown, and my effort is actual, yet there is no reality related to the effort. I am as a mimic on the stage, pretending to move on with all the proper parts in rhythmic motion, and yet remaining where I was before. No, it is still worse, for not only the movement on the spot is a pretence creating an illusion, but the very concept of a pretender is fictitious.

It is all a question of relationship. I move up in relation to the escalator; the escalator moves down in relation to its surroundings. And thus, for all my efforts in pretending to climb, I may even be retrogressing. The "I", the environment, the action, reaction, the world of events, they are all a question of relationship. Gold is of greater value than silver, because it is relatively rarer. The prices of goods increase when there is a scarcity or a greater demand. The hardness of wood is not intrinsic; and compared to stone no wood is hard at all. And even among stones there is a great variety of hardness. Well, it is this relationship which constitutes the value and the price we are asked to pay. Hardness determines durability; softness determines pliability; and. so both have their uses and their values, and frequently their conflicts.

Now, in the same way as physical matter is determined in its extension, expansion and its degree of impenetrability, by its solidity which repels, rejects and refuses to co-operate, so it is determined in its consistency, endurance and tendency to remain uniform, by its cohesion which attracts, clings together and unites. These natural forces are relatively working in opposite directions, attracting and repelling, and are thereby causing not only relative motion, but even friction. All this is expressed in the *abhidharmic* classification of elementary qualities: *pa.thavi, ¯apo, tejo, vāyo*; earth for extension, water

for cohesion, air for motion and fire for friction, the four elements which push and pull, and burn and turn.

When we come to the conscious level of human nature, we find a similar application of characteristic tendencies, where love attracts and hate repels, causing the friction of conflict in the heat of pas- sion. Again, it is all a question of relationship, of possessive love and rejecting hate, with the relative motions which make the problem, engendering the passion which causes the conflict. An understanding, therefore, of these relative obstacles, which are truly binding fetters, is very essential for a comprehensive understanding of the path, where no relative progress can be marked, because there is no walker in the ultimate sense. That does not mean that there is no love and hate in the world. It only means that we understand neither love, nor hate, neither their progress, nor their friction.

In the usual list of the ten *saṁyojanas*, the ten obstacles, on the way to arahantship, they are referred to as sensual pleasure (*kāmacchanda*) and aversion (*vyapāda*). And they mean much the same as the terms we use loosely as love and hate. Of course, there is the sublime state (*brahmavihāra*) of loving kindness (*mettā*) which is far removed from the carnal sense delights and which has such divine-like qualities that even one's enemy can become an object of this all-pervading, all-embracing, unifying love, which cannot distinguish between itself and its object, between giving and receiving, in the purity of its perfection. But that is a state of which the worldling has no knowledge; and when one speaks of love in the ordinary sense of a worldly emotion, it is the sense-satisfaction derived from association.

Thus we speak of love and hate as emotions, but they are much more than that. An emotion is an excitement, a passing phase, a reaction. But love and hate—though they show themselves as reactions each time there is a physical or mental presentation of the beloved or hated object—are rather dispositions dominated by passion, which have become a mental attitude through the accumulation of many reactions. And those disposition form the basis of one's character. Characters can be changed by the dropping off of dispositions. But a disposition cannot be changed; it *is*, or it is *not*.

Here then we speak of love and hate, not as a mere act of love or expression of hate, which is mostly a reaction, a movement or an emotion. If one man stabs another in anger under great provocation, it might be an act of hate, but that would not give him a hateful disposition. When a man rapes a woman, that is also a reaction to a certain allurement, but it is no sign of a loving disposition. We are dealing here with obstacles on the way; and sudden outbursts are not always symptoms of such dispositions. A disposition is a stationing of forces, a developed tendency which has become a natural inclination; and because of its enduring qualities it becomes an obstacle and a fetter.

A disposition towards sensual pleasures (*kāmacchanda*) is one of relationship in which one factor is always the "self". All our problems, of course, have that in common; and that makes their solution in a way so simple. Once they are solved in the proper manner, in the meaning of being dissolved, there can be no recurrence. Thus, once on the noble path (*ariya magga*) of perfection, there is no turning back; once a delusion is understood to be a delusion, it can never again assume the image of reality. All our conflicts are due to friction between a desire for continuance and the experience of impermanence. This experience comes through the senses, the five senses of the body and the reflection of the mind. As long as sensual experiences are *perceived* to be reactions of the senses, no complication of relationship has set in. But, when such perceptions are *conceived* as reflections in the mind, they are reborn in relation to the mind which classifies them, registers them and stores them away in memory. It is in this selective process that experiences are appropriated for their value. The pleasures of the senses make the "ego" grow; and memory will recall them, in order to live in them again. Thus they derive their value from their relationship to the "ego". In themselves these sensations are mere events, in which there is only the act of experience without the attachment or the repulsion of an experiencer. But, if the desire for continuance has nothing to feed on, it will naturally wither; and, therefore, the mind selects the pleasurable sense-experiences to feed that desire for continuance, without which the "self" cannot exist.

Such conceptualised duality, of course, causes a problem with a constant conflict. And that problem cannot be solved by raising love to a divine love, or by raising the status of the "self" to that of a super-self, an eternal soul, the *paramātman*. The relative can never become the absolute. Thus, the first thing to do is to understand our private and

individual loves and hates, in relation to the world of events in which we live and move and have our being. Of all our sensual experiences the sexual relationship is regarded as the most difficult one. It is true that we have outgrown the time when sex was thought of as a dirty word. But we are still very far from considering it as a natural appetite. It is easy to blame society for that; but it remains a fact that we are that society, and we are not prepared to break with that society. How is it then, that of all sensual experiences the sexual relationship has assumed such extraordinary proportions and values, so much that for all practical purposes love is equated with sex?

The pleasures derived from the satisfaction of the desires of the senses of the eye, the ear, the nose and the tongue are comparatively simple: colours, music, perfume, a tasty dish are easily procured, enjoyed, stowed away and reproduced at will. But in the experience of the sexual act the whole personality is involved to an ecstatic level which cannot be stored away, except as a dead memory. Moreover, in our drab age of imitation, a real artist is rare; but in this sexual act everybody can be a creator, and it is through this act that we can give life, re-create ourselves and thus achieve that continuation of the "ego" which is so necessary to life as we have misunderstood it.

Sex-relations form a problem also on account of the placing of sexes as opposites, ignoring (or perhaps not realising) that femininity and masculinity can be expressed by all in many ways apart from the limitations of the generative organs. Feminine activity is that which gives form to the formless, is that which assists in development and growth. But, for this there must be a passive attitude of receiving and assimilating, before there can be the action of ex- pressing without assertion, action with generosity and humility, with docility and acceptance. Masculine activity, on the other hand, is that which initiates, directs and intensifies. It is the active attitude which gives strength to growth, guidance to emotion, reason to action. But there is the danger of aggressiveness in leadership, of pride in rationality, of meanness in egotism. And thus, there is no real opposition, but far more the opportunity of completion. In a perfect blending there is not just a balance of the passive and active elements, but a growing together into a harmonious whole.

When the characteristics of the sexes are taken apart then sensual pleasure becomes emotion without intelligence, which is passion, which is friction, which is the beginning of conflict. As long as sex is indulged in as a means to fulfill an insufficiency, to satisfy a hunger, to gratify an inner discontentment, it is merely an escape from actuality, a search for an ideal. And if that ideal is superimposed on one's mate, there is bound to be disillusionment. When the names seek their own satisfaction, they are more concerned with their need which becomes a greed in action. Then, so-called love is based on selection according to an ideal which is but an image or an extension of oneself. And that in an obstacle, a hindrance, a fetter which cannot be removed by celibacy, by abstention, but only by understanding.

Most of what is called love is actually nothing but predilection, favouring one more than another, as a mother's special love for her weakest child. But that necessarily results in the exclusion of others who are less favoured. A turning to one in particular naturally comprises a turning away from another, who thereby becomes an object of aversion. Thus, particular friendship easily evokes jealousy. It brings about the mistaken idea of exclusive rights, which are rooted not in the other but in "self". As long as sympathy and antipathy, conversion and aversion, turn round the centre of "self", they can only (as heat and cold) differ in degree, but not in kind. Both are expressions of selfishness, in which love is agreement with "self", while disagreement becomes hate.

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In aversion (*vyapāda*), too, we may distinguish the emotion from the disposition. An emotional outburst may arise and pass off, but the disposition remains owing to its turned-away attitude. Such aversion is due to the mental attitude which (as in the case of so- called love) is based on the distinction between "self" and others. In fact, the two sentiments, although appearing to be opposites, show to have sprung from a common root. For, although affection is only proper to love, and aversion to hate, still both attraction, and repulsion are the results of desire and fear, basically rooted in "self". The hope of exclusive possession, which is taken for love, is tinged with desire and fear, as much as it is repelling instinct in hate. Fear is common to both, and that, of course, is conditioned by ignorance. For, though love and hate have others as their direct object, it is really the "self" as a misunderstood delusion which is the root of the dispositions.

But a mere psychological explanation of sentiments of hate and a disposition of aversion as primary, instinctive fear does not dissolve this hate any more than the methods of moralists who preach the conversion of hate into love. “Love thy neighbour. Love thine enemy” are beautiful slogans as “Forgive and forget”. But, what is there to forgive, if one has forgotten? Where is the enemy, if I love him? All may try to overcome hate, but the true release from this fetter is found only in the solving of the love for “self”.

Demands for social equality, solidarity, “esprit de corps” much more often than not, arise in a mind with an inferiority complex, and that means a mind with a hateful complex. Only a man with a grudge will talk of minority rights. The demand is then only a camouflage for his envy, for his discontent with the prosperity of others. It is not necessarily greed which makes one wish for the come-down of someone else; there may be no personal gain to acquire. Envy is not greed, but ill-will, aversion, hate. And that may grow into satisfaction over the misfortune of someone else; it may express itself in cruelty, providing sadistic satisfaction.

Hate is a hiding place in which to bury our own guilt, in which to hide the failures of our own fault, in order to blind the light of our own conscience. Then it becomes an easy way trying to find someone to blame. In hate we hug the memory of our mistakes, as in hate we commemorate the death of our heroes. It is perhaps the most stupid way of trying to solve our problems. It was the way Adam tried to cover up his guilt by putting the blame on Eve, and she in turn on the serpent. And we have been doing that ever since, whenever we take revenge on someone else after having been blamed ourselves. It is an escape in a desire to destroy the opposing element, in order to eliminate that which is considered the cause of the conflict. That cause, however, does not lie in the object of our wrath, not even in the subject which exposes ourselves for what we are, but in the action of turning-away, of aversion, of refusing to see what we are. But we cannot easily hate ourselves, for that would be self destructive. And so we divert our hate to others, while loving ourselves.

That self-love can be, however, so pervert that it begins to look like hate which appears to turn against oneself. It seems strange that the self-preservative instinct can so forget itself, as to develop hate for oneself. But that is only self-deception. The wish to destroy all objects which are a source of conflict may become stronger than the sense of loss experienced in the process. This can be seen in ascetics, who discovering in their body

a source of sin, inflict on themselves tortures which appear expressions of hate, but which give them in reality such immense satisfaction that they can smile happily entranced in the midst of their self-inflicted mortifications, with the happiness of masochism.

Hate is a kind of hostility, the outbreak of which must be sought in conflicting desires. The antithesis of "self" and "non-self" forms the basis for the opposites of pleasure and pain. When "self" becomes identified with pleasure, the other one, the object, the "non- self" becomes identified with hate; and so love arises because of the pleasure given to "self", while hate is encouraged because it provides satisfaction through self-assertion. Therefore, whatever way we look at love and hate, in conversion or aversion, it is not the object which counts or should be eliminated, but the selfish action of the subject which has produced the various emotions to serve its own end. If one tries to overcome feelings of antipathy by sending out thoughts of loving kindness, one is merely overworking those emotions into provocative reactions, which make pure action an impossibility. Universal love cannot arise as long as people are classified as friendly, hostile or indifferent. But when both love and hate are understood to be the outcome of false evaluations, based on a misconception of "self" and an isolation from others, then this fetter will have been broken, not by setting others free from my desire for love and fear of hate, but by a deposed disposition, which is an inner freedom, arising from true understanding.

It is not in renunciation and the isolation of concentration that this freedom can be realised, but in the awareness of the friction caused by relationship. The understanding of relationship, therefore, is of the utmost importance. The reality of relationship lies in its actuality. As a concept it is as meaningless as the wind without blowing. It is, therefore, in actuality that relationship must be understood. And such relationship cannot exist between realities as real entities. Entities which are considered permanent as a substance or a soul, cannot be subject to change, to influence, to relationship. They have to be absolute, or not at all. And, of course, there cannot be two or more absolutes. Even one absolute is too much, for, no relationship will be possible without making it relative; and that would be the end of the absolute.

Relationship must be therefore actual, and that is dependent on conditions, on contact, on action and reaction. It is in action that contact is made, that love and hate arise. And as there is no abiding individuality in the relative, there is no permanence in actual relationship. The emotions of love and hate engendered in contact are thus emotional reactions based on conditions, relations of co- existence and succession, of presence and absence, in other words, pure actualities without reference to real entities. In the totality of the process of evolution and involution these relations have neither meaning nor existence. They are mere modes of proceeding, as ripples and wavelets in a flowing river.

Eventual friction between such relations does not affect the continuance of the process, and is therefore of no importance. Yet, the values given to these relations have lifted them out of the context and are used to give personality to the individual process. It is in love and hate that the "I" can endure. Thus, with the realisation that this "self" is but a delusion, created for the purpose of endurance, the relationship of love and hate also becomes meaningless.

What remains is not a soulless machine, incapable of understanding need, incapable of independent action, but an understanding which is not isolated in egoism, which is not dependent on pleasure for expansion or on hate for strength. but which can embrace all, because it does not discriminate between "self" and "non-self" having overcome both, and which can act spontaneously without motive through perfect understanding and comprehension.

Sublimation or Desire

Along the road we find here and there small flowers growing, not planted, not cultivated, insignificant perhaps, but growing against tremendous odds. The road has not been laid alongside those flowers, and yet they belong together. The small flowers have no value: they are weeds and nobody plucks them, not even for the temple. And so they are there, not cared for, not cultured, and not plucked, possessed by nobody, but belonging to the path, and yet not on the path. The road does not; lead to them, and they are not the destination of the road. They grow here and there, while the road stretches out, mile after mile, without proceeding. And the wild, simple flowers do not move with the road, but they are there, every- where, all the time, and each time new and different. That is life: a road. That is truth: a flower.

We have searched for truth, deep in ourselves, and found there only our own concept of truth, man-made, as the statue in the temple. In perplexity we have searched for truth in prayer and in sacrifice, and we found that prayers are only our own desires and that our offerings are made to the gods of our own choice, that is my-self. We have searched for truth in love, and found only the Satisfaction of our sense-desires. We have turned away from ourselves in hate and found ourselves in conflict. And now we find ourselves on that road, unable to go back; for, he who has once entered the path cannot return. And we look around and we see those little flowers, flowers of beauty which give delight, and which ease the sadness of our heart. They are the flowers of weeds of the waste lands, where barren thoughts concentrate and flourish, and which survive where all else fails. without producing fruits.

When the senses have failed to satisfy, we turn to abstraction as a sublimation of our desires, to beauty in the spheres of form, and to abstract meditation in the formless spheres of thought. But, however sublime, it is still desire, desire for form (*rūparāga*), for the perfection—of beauty, the perfect form of logic and discursive thought—and desire for they formless (*arūparāga*), for the abstract of the infinite, in boundless space and consciousness.

Our search for beauty and the abstract is a search for comfort in the knowledge that the senses have failed so far to provide that comfort. But as long as we seek comfort, we seek ourselves, and that is living in illusion.

We seek comfort because we are living in fear. We are afraid, because we are living in insecurity. We are insecure, because we have no basis for "self".

Whether we understand the spheres of form (*rūpaloka*) and the formless (*arūpaloka*) as spheres of heaven, as super-heavens in which to be reborn, or as meditative spheres in which the mind can dwell in splendid isolation and aesthetic abstraction, they will always remain an occurrence and an experience. And in that experience, when it arises, there will be the experiencer as the witness, as the creator, as the thinker, forever tied by memory to the past, a self-projecting delusion of a craving to continue with or without form (*rūparāga, arūparāga*), the "self" as a soul, as an abiding, entity, as beauty incarnate, as truth absolute, a delusion supreme.

The beauty of logic (*vittaka-vicāra*) is only self-deception. Its analysis is like the action of a man who wants to discover the beauty of a flower by tearing off its petals one by one, till there is left neither flower, nor beauty. Beauty is never in the result, whether it is in imitation, analysis or dissection, but in the whole of actuality, in the grace of growth, in the spontaneity of movement, not in construction, not in imitation, not in reproduction, but in the smile of the eyes of a child. Does not the beauty of a river lie in its flow? Would there be any beauty in the ocean, if it were always as a perfect mirror, without a movement of its own? Thus, logic can be beautiful in the flow of its process, as a sequence of music and the flight of a bird.

But, that delight (*pīti*) and fulfilment (*sukha*) in experience cannot be analysed or called back in memory to be captured by the "self". For, its fulfilment lies exactly in the completeness of the act without self. We, however, try to make happiness into a sensation, into a concept which can be recalled by memory. But a thought is not happiness; it is a mind-made thing in which the "ego" can continue.

Can we make happiness? Is not the very idea of creating happiness an attempt at overcoming sorrow? An attempt at escaping from conflict? A running away from actuality?

When, however, there is an abandonment of "self", which is not self-renunciation, but an abandoning of self-projecting thought, then there is a quieting of the process which is now deprived of the impulse to attain. And in that smooth and undisturbed proceeding of actuality there is no agitation, no escaping, no renunciation, no searching, no sensation, no

perplexity, no conflict, because there is no "self". And that is peace!

We must not confuse beauty which is the essence of the spheres of form (*rūpaloka*) with the response of the senses in the spheres of the sensual (*kāmaloka*). We may be moved by the graceful curves of an arched bridge across a river, by the slender lines of a palm tree silhouetted against the evening sky, by the forceful lines of modern architecture, by the intricate designs of ancient art. It is possible to be conditioned into accepting style as beauty; but then the concept of beauty will change with the changing culture of tradition.

There must have been a time, when people appreciated the whimsical. ornamentation of baroque style; but what they then considered as beautiful was only the response to the conditioning of their senses. Presently, our senses are being conditioned by the bizarre lines of futuristic and surrealistic painters. Metre and rhyme of poetry have long given way to the shock irregularity of blank verse. Blending of soft colours has been replaced by striking contrasts in psychedelic designs. But is beauty dependent on education and tradition?

Most art is imitative, which is the reason why there are schools of art, where pupils are taught the technique of the master. But that is not creative; and that cannot be beauty. But, even when creative art is untraditional, it is not beautiful merely because it is self-expressive, even though the senses respond.

Beauty is that quality where the viewer melts into the view, where there is full absorption of the listener into the music, where there is no "self". But in our search for happiness in the sphere of form and beauty, we may become lost in that which is of the making of our own mind, and thereby miss the beauty of actuality all around us.

Mental absorption (*rūpa-jhāna*) in a particular method of meditation may provide a quietude of mind (*samatha*), a satisfaction in its abstraction from the actual. Then it will not be very different from the absorption of a child at play with a new toy. When interest in the new toy wanes, the earlier restlessness is back again.

Thus, the cultivation of love (*mettā*) through meditation (*bhāvanā*), notwithstanding its possibility of arriving at the, highest trance of even indedness in universal love, is still a mental exercise, which has a concept of love as its goal, whereas there should be love at the beginning, love which does not need the promptings of the mind, not the emotions of the

heart, but which has no "self" in it, and so can see beauty in itself, and be it, in silence in which the observer has ceased.

What do we achieve then in the states of mental absorption in the spheres of form (*rūpa-jhāna*)? It is concentration which leads us to a positive goal of spiritual joy (*pīti*), closing the doors of our senses to sensuous pleasures, and fixing the mind on one centre (*ek- aggatā*). It is in these states of mental absorption, as well as in the spheres of rebirth corresponding to these states, that the hindrances are not felt, even if they are not overcome. That means, we live for the time being in a world of well-being (*sukha*) which is so devoid of worldly pleasures, that the conflict does not constitute a problem. No wonder, that the mind, once involved in these spheres, finds great reluctance to disentangle the process. Where concentration closes the door of the senses and fixes thought on the centre of our choice, there meditation would open the door with mindfulness for whatever may lie beyond, without choice which is but self-assertion. Thereby the "self", the centre, is lost sight of in awareness of what happens to be, to see things as they are, and not as I want them to be. Where concentration leads to joy and trance perhaps, meditation does not lead on, but opens up to silence of thought and the void of insight. In the insight of meditation there is an emptying of experience, thereby bringing about a cessation of a delusion and a dissolution of all conflict. In meditation, which is not a concentration of absorbing interest, there is no place for spiritual joy and well-being, for there is no place for "self". Then one does not induce some mental state which transcends all mundane experience; then one does not experiment with peace or beauty; but there is peace and beauty. For, in insight there is no meditator, no reflector, no memory, no observer, but just the experiencing of the void which alone is freedom and deliverance from all forms of beauty and abstract concepts of "self", the realisation of *anatta*.

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As long as meditation is an exercise of concentration which is mind control, it is a means to an end, whether that be birth in the spheres of beauty (*rūpaloka*), or in the spheres of the abstract (*arūpaloka*). And a means to an end is a fetter to a concept, an attachment to an ideal (*rūparāga, arūparāga*). For, it is thought which has created the world of form; and we call it beauty. It is also thought which has created the abstract from form; and we call it the sphere of the formless, in which thought can expand itself infinitely, purifying itself from sense-desire, elevating itself above spiritual delight, sublime in its abstraction, transcending all emotion, till perception becomes itself imperceptible (*neva-saññā n'asaññā*) and all sense and mind-reaction cease (*saññā vedayita-nirodha*).

But, even this highest achievement (*samāpatti*) can be an obstacle in the way, for it is not yet the end of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*). It may appear a sublimation of desire, but with all its abstraction it has still the seed of desire. It is still "thought" which is impermanent; and so the mind created spheres of beauty and abstraction are also impermanent, changing, based on memory of emotions, and hence illusory, void of meaning and of substance.

These sublimations are so refined that they are sometimes, referred to as the eight stages of deliverance (*attha-vimokkha*). And that has caused some misunderstanding at times. Thus a monk who had attained the mental state of concentration in the sphere of unbounded space (*ākāsañcanāyatana*) and was said to have won "access to the imperturbable" was thought by some to have attained the unconditioned state of Nibbāna.

It is from a simple concentration on open but limited space that the mind proceeds to concentrate on the essence of space which is then thought of as boundless. The mind is now free from sense- desires and free from the limitations which give boundaries even to empty space. But with the complete transcending of material perceptions, with the disappearance of the perception of sensory reactions—that is transcending not only matter and the perception thereof, but transcending even the sensory reactions to such perception—the first stage of mental absorption in the abstract spheres of immateriality (*arūpa-jhāna*) is attained.

It is indeed a sublimation of desire which, however, is not free from craving (*arūpa-raga*). This state may be desired as a form of concentration on the concept of unbounded space (*ākāsanancayatana*) in which no sense-disturbance can penetrate, and which, therefore, constitutes a perfect escape from the actuality of conflict. Or it may be desired as a sphere of rebirth, in which life can be prolonged and limitless bliss enjoyed without the burden of carnal delights, which are not only gross, but leave behind the bitter taste of unfulfilment. It will not take long for an uninhibited mind to realise that space is but a possibility of occupancy; and that it has, therefore, no characteristics of its own. The extension of its boundaries and even the complete removal of all its limitations do not give it any reality. It is still a possibility of occupancy. And a possibility is not even an actuality. It is just a concept, an image of the mind, a deluding reflection of mind's action.

Then the mind will naturally reflect that it is not space which is boundless, but the mind which is able to expand the boundaries of its field of enquiry endlessly. Thus is formed the concept of infinite consciousness, in the sphere of which the mind now loses itself in abstract concentration (*viññānañcāyatana*), the almost perfect escape for a mind which is tired of its own rambling, and now has taken the concept of infinity as the object of its concentration, only to discover that this concept is the mind's own action, now trying to identify itself with this image of infinity. It is an attempt to lose one- self in the absolute, to realise that the little individual "ego" is not separate from the universal "self", the "*paramātman*", that "I am That". It is this conceptualisation of infinite consciousness which is found in many saints who have experienced the mystic union of the soul with God. And this is indeed one of the most difficult stages or obstacles to overcome, because, for the mind which believes to be a soul unified with God, there is nothing more to be desired.

Expanding consciousness is the experience of an immature mind, which is conditioned by visions of success, fame and achievement. Such a small mind wants to expand into the infinite, and wants to use concentration as a means to deliverance, to attain freedom from the finite by concentration on the infinite, the sphere of unbounded consciousness. This effort appears to be entirely fruitless; for, although it may produce a deep trance-state of formless ecstasy (*arūpa jhāna*)— although it may produce even a rebirth in some formless abstract sphere, where even the sense-pleasures of the devas are left behind, it cannot lead to insight which alone is the path to deliverance. It is not concentration which can lead to freedom, it is not the tranquillity of abstraction which can be turned into an independent self-determination, but rather the other way round: it is freedom and detachment from any form of thought which alone can lead to meditation. Only in so far as one is free can one meditate, unhindered by concepts of logic and of bliss, free from thoughts of virtue and of sin, unbound by traditional beliefs and social responsibility.

Other states of mental absorption in the spheres of the formless (*arūpa-jhāna*) had been attained by the early teachers of the bodhisatta. Ālāra Kālāma had been able to lead him up lo the third stage, the mental realisation of not being anyone (*akiñcaññāyatana*), and the awareness that there is not any "thing", which is not the annihilationist view of "nothing", but a. loose approximation to the realisation of anatta. *Akiñcaññāyatana* is strictly speaking not a sphere of nothingness, which implies a contradiction, such as some- thing of nothing, but a mental sphere in which the universality of space and consciousness is realised as an empty thought. In the awareness of the nature of the mind, viz. that this is just a mental process without inherent or abiding entity— this same infinity of space and thought is seen as no "thing" (*akincana*). Thus, not being anything, not being attached to anything, and hence owning nothing, is the immediate fruit of this third stage of immaterial or formless concentration and absorption (*arūpa-jhāna*) Such insight

knowledge may be but little removed from the perfect insight (*aññā*) which has complete deliverance as its immediate fruition. Yet, the difference is so essential that this form of concentration may lead to suspension of thought and perception (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*), but not to the cessation of becoming (*bhava-nirodha*).

On the contrary, it is a bondage, when it becomes an object of attachment, when the deluded "I" imagines to have achieved and attained the final goal.

Uddaka Rāmaputta brought the bodhisatta another step forward, by opening up for him the mental state where perception is so subtle and purified that it is imperceptible (*n'eva-saññā- nasaññāyatana*). It is the sphere or mental state which has completely abandoned and bypassed the void of material space and its mental concept in infinity to become itself imperceptible to itself, a total absorption in which there is no thought of "I" in the action of attainment.

But even then, the bodhisatta realised that neither state was completely free from illusion, and, therefore, not conducive to disenchantment (*nibbidā*); that there was still an element of attachment, and therefore not conducive to dispassion (*virāga*); that there was still a continuation of the thought-process, and therefore not conducive to cessation (*nirodha*); that there was still an element of striving, and therefore not conducive to tranquillity (*upasama*); that there was still trust in knowledge, and therefore not conducive to insight (*abhiññā*); that there was still reliance on memory, and therefore not conducive to awakening (*sambodhi*); that there was still the delusion of attainment, and therefore not conducive to deliverance (*nibbāna*).

In craving for the formless, truth is made an object, separate from the individual who is then viewed as the subject. The very methods employed to bring the subject closer to the object, merely bind a man to rebirth in his desire for the supreme escape in infinity. Such state of perfection, seen as an ornament, is actually a fetter; may be pure and noble as gold, but still an obstacle on the way. To discard the form of the environment and search for its real meaning in the abstract formless, is to look for a substance under the phenomena, for eternity in the concepts of time and space, for permanence in the process of change, for an everlasting universal soul in a cosmos where unity is only one of action, interaction and reaction.

In craving for infinity we are already dead to the present. But he who lives in the present, which is eternally new because it is always beginning, he is free from forms which bind one to systems and traditions; he does not search for reality in abstractions, but realises the truth in actuality. Then, all values will be seen as false and there will be no more craving for beauty in form and thought, and no more craving for escape in an infinity of abstraction and delusion.

Such a one is said to be a non-returner (*anāgāmī*) to the spheres of sense, although not yet freed from the bonds of existence. He will need one more life to shed those final fetters which are so fine that we are mostly not even aware of their existence. But the end is in view, and the stream will now carry—through the last obstacles—to the vast ocean where all rivers lose their name, all delusion vanishes, all conflicts dissolve, with the ceasing of ignorance in the comprehensive insight of the arahant, for whom alone there is no more rebirth, because there is no more "self".

The Final Fetters

On more than one occasion we have seen that conflict in the world and in ourselves arises by the attachment of wrong values to physical and psychical phenomena. In a way, it is not correct to speak of "wrong" values, as if there were also right values. A value is a determination of the desirability of certain qualities, which may be commercial, social, economic, ethical; and so we speak not only of exchange value, surrender value and face value, but also of spiritual value. But, whatever may be the field in which the word is used, it is always an estimate of desirability.

Now, a desire is always for something which is not actual in the present. One may desire the acquisition of an object, a status, a title, and after acquisition one may desire the continuation of that condition of possession. But the object of desire is never actual; that means, it is ideal; we have given it at value which does not belong to it. And, in that sense, all values are wrong. It is not too difficult to understand this; and understanding it, we have to accept it as a fact. That was done. when we considered the first impediment or obstacle on the way: the misconception of individuality (*sakkāya- diṭṭhi*) which introduced a desire for permanent values within the process of impermanence (*anicca*), a desire for satisfactory values within the process of conflict (*dukkha*), a desire for substantial values within the process of the unsubstantial void (*anatta*). If we had followed all that carefully, we might have entered on the path by overcoming those initial impediments.

But even so, we are faced now with an obstacle which we might have thought to have left behind right at the beginning. It is the obstacle, the impediment, the hindrance, the fetter of egotism, of arrogance, of pride (*māna*), which is now shown to us as persisting even in a non-returner (*anāgāmin*), long after he has overcome the obstacle of misconception as regards a separate individuality. Only the fully accomplished arahant is said to be free from this final fetter.

Then, what is the, difference between the misconception of individuality (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) and the pride which says "I am" (*asmi-māna*)? One would have thought, once it was grasped fully that the individuality-concept was a delusion, that there would be no further ground for arrogance and pride. But we see, on the contrary, that although that delusion is vanquished and vanished right from the beginning when a worldling enters the stream towards deliverance, as a *sotāpanna*, even the subsequent stages of a once-returner (*sakadāgāmin*) and of a non-returner (*anāgāmin*) are not free from this subtle pride in attainment, arrogance of virtue, egotistic superiority. Such was the case with the *sotāpanna* monk Khemaka, who admitted that he had still got the idea of "self" in his mental- physical make-up, although he did not discern such a "self" (S. III.128). A mere conviction that there is no "I" does not mean that the truth of soullessness has been fully comprehended. Al- though Ānanda, the beloved disciple and personal attendant of the Buddha, had entered the stream to deliverance at the time of the passing away of the Buddha, yet he was overcome with personal grief when he saw his Master dying, whereas those other disciples who had attained the complete freedom from all fetters, as arahants, did not grieve, because in them there was no conflict of a personal attachment with the universal law of impermanence, to which the life span of a Buddha is no exception.

It is possible to be convinced of a truth as a thesis through logical argument, and accept that thesis as an irrefutable and verifiable truth, and yet not to allow such truth to permeate every single action and thought of our daily life. We are all convinced of the absolute necessity of law and order; yet are frequently inclined to allow ourselves certain liberties when self-interest seems more important. Few are the motorists who never break the highway code. It is typical that we speak of liberties, rather than transgressions, Well, this taking of liberties is the assumption of a right or power which has no basis apart from self-presumption, placing oneself above the law. It is the view or rather the misconception of a separate I-entity which has been discarded intellectually, officially so to speak, but which is allowed to continue in selfish activity. It is the duality of mind and heart, of intellect and feeling, of knowing and willing, which can accept rationally and reject emotionally at the same time. It is of this kind of material that conflict is born.

This attitude is indeed the "I"-maker (*ahaṁ kāra*) which as self-righteousness cloaks itself in virtue, sometimes with overbearing arrogance. It is the conceit of power which makes the intellect dominate, when words become all-powerful, when slogans are used to rouse the emotions which were left unmoved by the intellect. Such feelings then are only emotional self-indulgence, which is usually self-pity, a subconscious acknowledgement of intellectual inferiority. It is an assertion of belief in religious matters, of authority in political matters, of "self" in all matters, as an indication of fear that without such assertion life may be meaningless.

There is also that peculiar kind of pride which is not born of the satisfaction of achievement, not of a feeling of security through wealth acquired, but a pride of blood, of belonging to a noble race, to an ancient religion, to a traditional culture, none of which has anything to do with what one actually is. It is pride of the past, pride of being part of that past, pride which is rooted in psychological memory based on fear that without this inheritance, without this past, without this memory, we are not.

And although we know it as a fact, we cannot afford to admit it, as our entire build-up is based on assertion. A sense of power is derived from austerity in isolation, as well as from association in communal effort. But, power in any form is evil, for it is not the way of reality. Power means envy, greed, authority, fear, division, opposition, all of which is conflict.

Is it possible to live without assertion which is arrogance and pride? It is the same question as: is it possible to live without "self"? For, it is pride which says "I am" (*asmi māna*); it is arrogance which is the "I"-maker (*ahaṁkāra*).

Conceit is not an assertion as a claim to recognition of rights, but rather an idealisation of claims to which we have no right. Thus, primitive instincts and fundamental needs are presented as perfections, by means of which we can sublimate the ordinary claims of nature. This sublimation of one's own nature and character involves always contempt for another, and, of course, a covering-up of one's own insufficiency. Thus, one takes pride in a collection of paintings gathered over the years. The satisfaction is not in the beauty of the art, however, but in the possession of it, which is just one way of expanding the "self" through ownership.

Ownership is an expression of that pride which says “I am”. To the man of pride his house is as his statue; his wife and children carry his name; his good works perpetuate that name, here on earth to be remembered, and in heaven to be rewarded. It is this identification of ourselves with action, which is the attempt to continue in action, or to continue the satisfaction derived from that action. But, when we identify ourselves with something (as we are doing all the time, in religion, in politics, in sense-pleasures)—and when that is taken away from us, or when we become disappointed with that ideal— naturally we feel as if death has overtaken us. But in reality, we have never been alive; for by demanding a continuation, an expansion of “self” in the pleasures of the body, in the delight of the spirit, we have been inviting the separation and the isolation which is death. Pride is a reflection, a projection, a reproduction, according to ideal standards; and hence it is a delusion which leads astray and becomes an obstacle on the way, a fetter so strong that only the arahant, the perfect saint, is free from it. But that freedom will not come about, until we realise how at bottom we are hypocrites in our pretension to be different from what we are, in our reliance on false values, in taking pride in a self-projected picture on the screen, which has no reality. no value. No permanence, which is but a shadow of a desire.

And yet, this very recognition, as long as it has not become a complete realisation, has the impelling force to clothe that nakedness, to give movement to that “still”, to fill that void. Thus, from an awareness of this inner emptiness, if not well understood, may arise an outward movement which is conflict. To stop this conflict, we must stop reaching out, but not substitute that with a reaching inward, as many religious would teach, and which, in fact, is the goal of all agitation.

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Agitation (*uddhacca*) is towards the future, which is an ideal based on experiences of the past, preserved in memory. It is a striving for security, in which effort we try to find the new, without letting go of the old. We want to be more clever, more wealthy, more powerful than someone else, for that, we hope, will give a sense of security. And that causes the uncertainty which makes us feel lost among the many promises of security, of salvation. We run behind the various promises

without knowing why we run away from what we do not know. But as long as we run away, either behind the promise of reward, or away from the fear of uncertainty, our running is meaningless, because the motive prevents us from understanding, from seeing the road on which we are running. And so we get more confused than ever before, in our search for a future, in an act of self-pity, born from our fear of impermanence.

Agitation is an action which builds up resistance, a force to overcome the restrictions we experience, and which then becomes a bondage itself. If I do not like my neighbour, I shut him out by building a high wall between our properties but he is still my neighbour. And even if I cannot see him anymore, the wall which I have built remains a constant reminder. And so, my resistance has not been a solution. I cannot escape in another way, because I am bound to my own property on which I have now built my wall. It is the resistance of agitation which has become my bondage, and the wall has become the symbol of my resistance through which I am feeding my hate, even though the object is excluded.

If we want to put away something deliberately, the vehemence of aversion will make of it a conflict in agitation; for, it will be a tearing up with the roots which is painful. But, if we see the truth, i.e. the negation of its value in impermanence (*anicca*), the negation of its existence in conflict (*dukkha*), the negation of its essence in the void of *anatta*, then we need not pull it out, for it is a delusion which will wither by itself, when we cease nourishing it.

The void seen as a fact cannot lead to despair, when the enmity with which we tried to fill that void is seen as a delusion. The void seen as a fact cannot lead to contentment either, for a delusion when it is discovered cannot offer any satisfaction. The void cannot be accepted, just because it is void. And that has stopped all reaching outward or inward, all agitation in conflict.

But agitation is sometimes not a stretching out for attainment. Frequently it is just a revolt, an act of rebellion, a reaction of disgust, a protest against order, against authority, against the establishment of state, society and religion. It is obvious that the established order has failed to produce any order at all. Two world wars within living memory and periods of peace which are a war of nerves and a preparation for a final catastrophe which will certainly end all war

because it will end all life—all that has shown us in chaos that it is not possible to expect any order or security. And thus there is a revolt in the air which has caught our younger generation in a refusal to submit, or to follow a generation which so obviously has failed. Such agitation, therefore, is a natural reaction. But a reaction is only an extension of the action and is therefore not different from it, essentially. And thus, if the last generation has failed to provide security, a reactionary agitation which is a revolt will certainly not provide any more security.

There are others who lack the courage of disgust and who do not revolt, but try to reform society, to reform religion, to reform the world. But a reform is a kind of repair, a patching up of the old system. Neither kind of agitation can make us free from the system. For, whether we like it or not, whether we try to revolt or to reform, whether we grow our hair long or cut it short, we are still part of that culture, of that society. And so we rebel against ourselves, and need not be angry with a society which has produced us, as much as we produce that society.

But what is it that agitates? What is it that we resist so much? We condemn without understanding. And if we understand fully, we need not revolt, for we shall be free. We attach values to social customs which are stupid. But, if we understand them as stupid, we need not replace them with another pattern which is as stupid and imitative as the earlier system. For, it is the nature of any system or organisation to be imitative; and that is non-creative, which leads to dullness, stupidity and ignorance. This kind of agitation which is reaction, cannot be creative, which is clear from the fact of imitation in youth fashions, in dress and mode of speech. There is not much difference between the old “squares” with their out-dated ways of thinking, and the young “round pegs” who are equally enslaved by their own ways of being “with it”, as long as their agitation is mere reaction without understanding.

If, however, we understand that imitation is a symptom of death, we can be national and rational at the same time; and then we need not show our present poverty of mind by always harping on past culture, but we may be truly creative. Then, the new birth will be neither a revolt nor a reform. Then we shall be free and independent under any form of constitution, for we shall not need the protection of a state-religion. But we want to reform the old, so that in a way it would be new, and yet be based on known values. The mind wants to be sure that it is not left without any values; and so we reform or replace the old order, as long as we have some system which will provide us the illusion of rights, of security, of order, in the state, the religion, the society, the family, the "self". All our agitation, therefore, is for establishment, and is really a contradiction. We agitate for rest, we shout for silence, we fight for peace, whereas all that would be there, as soon as we stop agitating, stop shouting, and stop fighting.

Agitation is anxiety, worry, fear. But is freedom found at the end of a life of fear? Is freedom the opposite of being caught and imprisoned? Is the kind of freedom for which we agitate not rather a concept born from our dislike of being bound by convention? Is it possible to search for freedom and remain bound in the mean time?

After a great deal of frustration one is inclined sometimes to give up all effort of striving. "What is the point of it!"—Exactly, there is no point in it. Neither is there any point in giving up with despair, and contemplating suicide. That too is striving, and requires effort. Then, what is one to do? The very question betrays not only the agitation of the mind, but also that one is still prepared to give life another chance to strive once again, to make another effort to break through. But there is no point in it. We are still chasing after the ideal concept of life, of success, of love, which has led us so many times to frustration and despair, notwithstanding the little patches of relief obtained through the satisfaction of the senses. But the ideal is not real, is not even actual. The ideal is a concept for tomorrow; and by living in and for that concept we do not live to-day at all. And hence the frustration, when the "self" discovers that tomorrow will never be to-day.

In understanding the nature and the cause of this frustration, the chase after the ideal will cease, and there will be an intensity of living today, when every action will receive full attention without prospecting a new region for results. Then every action will be a rebirth, untouched by the agitation of ambition, the desire for result, the motivation of "self". Then action will be pure and without fear. For, agitation is caused by fear.

Can I become free from fear? How could that ever be, when we see that it is fear that makes the "I"? Fear of the insecurity of impermanence has invented the concept of an abiding "self" to provide a platform for the security it wants. How then can the "I" ever be separated from fear? But when it is clearly seen that I am that fear, then fear will disappear without effort and without agitation.

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Ignorance (*avijjā*) is not a lack of knowledge. It is insincerity of thinking. To see things as they are (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*) is to be honest; and thus, ignorance, or self-delusion, is dishonest.

We do not want to be dishonest, but we constantly say things we do not really mean. We promise what we cannot possibly fulfill, or what we have no intention of doing at all. We flatter to remain on the good side. We praise in excess. We ignore our own shortcomings. We blame circumstances, we excuse our ignorance. This basic dishonesty has crept into our work, our beliefs, our relation- ships, so much that an honest man is disturbing. We are dishonest, not because we want to, but because we do not see it, because we live by standards, because we seek ideals, because we want security, success, comfort and not truth; because we are ignorant.

Ignorance cannot be overcome through knowledge for it is born of knowledge, which is specialised information. Analytical knowledge of the structure of the human body and of the function of the human mind do not provide life. Knowledge may produce results, but that is rebirth which is reaction of ignorance. For, the perfect action, which is spontaneous and unconditioned by desire, can arise only from the silence of insight. Only when the mind is empty, it can see clearly what is. As long as the mind is full of opinions, it is biased by the type of education it received, by the environment to which it is exposed, by the reactions of the memories of the past, and they all impede its seeing clearly. Thus, education, environment, memory, do not constitute real knowledge, but contribute to not- understanding.

Emotions blunt the sensitiveness of feelings (*vedanā*). Memory impedes the directness of perception (*saññā*). Environment distorts the natural formation of ideas (*saṅkhāra*). Knowledge colours the simplicity of intelligence (*viññāṇa*). Attachment to virtue, craving for sense-pleasures, emotional affection, sublimation of desire, righteous indignation, religious zeal, mental agitation and spiritual worry are all impediments to clear understanding, and are therefore kinds of ignorance.

Ignorance is in isolation, when sorrow becomes self-pity, merit becomes self-seeking, concentration becomes self-absorption, worry self-accusation, virtue self-complacency, renunciation self- immolation, ideals become self-deception, action becomes self-generating, achievement becomes self-glorification, striving self-improvement, violence self-justification, pride becomes self-respect. Thus, be it in virtue, be it in vice, in the isolation of the "self" there is ignorance, and, in ignorance there is a life of isolation and opposition, which is conflict. Thus, we suffer in ignorance through loneliness from which we try to escape in the many ways of virtue and of vice.

Ignorance is thus the cause of conflict, for we suffer where we need not suffer. In ignorance we turn to authority, to rituals, to prayer, to activity, to imitation, to withdrawal, to renunciation, to avoidance, to forgetfulness, all of which are escapes from a conflict which we have not understood. Unless we know the nature of the conflict in which we are caught, there can be no ending to sorrow. For, time does not heal, it only covers up, as a scab over a wound which remains festering inside. We have to remove the cover and probe the wound, which may be painful, but without which no cure is possible. Without the knowledge of insight, the conflict through ignorance cannot cease.

But, if we are so full of ignorance, how can we ever procure the knowledge of insight to lead us to the cessation of conflict? It is the non-existential in pursuit of the non-imaginable! In the very search for a method to destroy the self we are in the process of creating another "self". The path of truth is not that of a scientific "know-how", a path which can be followed step by step, with a proof for every experiment, with a knowledge where the next step is leading to. The path of truth is more like the flight of a bird, leaving no trace of its passing, unpredictable as to its next dive or surge; without logic, but full of actuality; without calculation. but full of vitality; with an unplanned spontaneity, always on the alert, fully detached, without identification, and therefore free.

We believe so much, because we observe so little. Here then, a beginning can be made without method, without hope. without grasping, by mere observation, mindfulness, which is meditation on what is. To see ourselves as false, as empty, as "hollow, stuffed men", that will at least make us see that we are living in a fools' paradise, in "death's other kingdom". If then, in seeing that, we are honest, we shall not be deluded by the false; and then we are free!

About the Author

Henri van Zeyst was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1905. Educated throughout in Catholic schools and colleges, he spent his final years of studies in philosophy and theology and the first year of his priestly ordination in an Italian monastery near Florence. At the age of 31 he was sent to London to be in charge of a new foundation of his Order, where he was also teaching Dogmatic Theology to the scholastics of Christus Rex Priory in North London. An intensive course of comparative religion brought him in contact with Buddhism. Within a year of his coming to Sri Lanka he was ordained a Buddhist monk there in 1938 under the name of Bhikkhu Dhammapāla. From 1956 to 1968 he worked at the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya of which he was in the final years of that period the Senior Assistant Editor and Administrative Officer. During the last stages of his life he was residing in a meditation centre at Nilambe, Kandy, giving instructions to those who came to him for guidance on meditation.

He died on 15 September, 1988.