A NEW APPROACH TO BUDDHISM

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Preface

"A New Approach" does not mean that we have not approached Buddhism before. It has been done in very many ways, dogmatically, devotionally, analytically, nemotechnically, always with authority, starting with the texts and applying them to daily life.

This is a "new" approach seeing life and its problems, searching, if possible, for a solution to life's conflict, but being guided by the Buddha's teachings, and therefore working as it were from the shell to the kernel, the simple way we eat a fruit.

The object was to make a non-Buddhist start from her standpoint, and slowly work inwardly. And see what happens.
May we all see, and understand.

Henri van Zeyst Kandy, July, 1978

A New Approach to Buddhism

When visiting foreign lands, people are naturally inclined to see first of all the differences. That is not just curiosity but it is man's innate thirst for knowledge. Even if one cannot understand at once the technical intricacies of modern machinery, one still wants to see how it works. Whether it is the electronic eye which opens a hotel door at a mere approach, or the method of draping an Indian Saree, we want to know, we want to learn. That applies to all fields of knowledge, of learning and of understanding. And thus, when it comes to religion, it is quite natural that one wants to know what are the differences. Any apparent similarities may be of interest to anthropologists trying to discover a common origin, but what the intelligent and educated man and woman want to know is the difference.

And that I want to make the basis of this little dissertation, while introducing Buddhism, an oriental "religion" to the western educated society. The differences are many; and I have therefore neither the time nor the inclination to bother you with technical details, but shall confine myself to the outlines with a new approach thereto. The mere summing up of these outlines may already cause some mild shocks, for the differences are such, that many western thinkers are inclined to say that Buddhism is not a religion at all. And perhaps they are right!

A Buddhist does not believe in an almighty God-Creator, as the origin of life; he does not believe in an eternal soul to live for ever after, in bliss or in punishment; he does not believe in creation, not in a fixed moral law; he does not believe in a free will, nor in doing good deeds for the sake of acquiring merit; his behavior is not ruled by commandments; yet his ultimate destination is as much misunderstood as it is by any Christian who has no inkling of what he has to believe of God.

Then what does a Buddhist believe in? In fact, he does not believe in anything or anybody, apart from the facts which he can observe and understand. And that is seeing, and not believing.

The Buddha

The Buddha was a human being, not of divine origin; he had his father and mother and was born in a natural way as all babies do east and west, north or south of the equator. He was born in India of some princely clan, of which there were hundreds in that sub-continent even up to the end of the British times quite recently, till they were paid off and sent packing by their own people under Shri Nehru. His status and his income gave him the leisure to look round and start thinking for himself. He, too, noticed the differences between the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, the living and the dead. And that made him think. The form of religion prevailing at that time was basically what we now know as the philosophy of Vedanta, but over crusted with superstition encouraged by a hereditary priest-caste, the Brahmins, who are born priests, just as others are born to nobility and warfare, or to trading and various professions, or to menial work. All that was supposed to be the arrangement of some almighty Super God, and there was no escape possible from that rigid caste system.

But the young prince (Siddhartha was his personal name, while his clan or family was called Gotama) saw the injustice, the unfairness of this unequal distribution of health, wealth and opportunity. And although he was very far from being a Communist, he had certainly that intense feeling which would like to remedy things, but did not know where to begin. Apart from the Brahmin priests, sacrificing to the many gods in their temples the offerings brought by their followers, there were many types of ascetics who had cut them- selves off from the worldly life, leading a solitary life as hermits, or grouped together as monks in a monastery, but always in search of truth by means of many forms of concentration and renunciation with self-inflicted penance, as can be seen up to this date in many parts of India.

When prince Siddhartha was 29 years old he left his palace and family, cut off his hair and, donning some ascetic garb, joined such a band of ascetics. He excelled them all by his fervor and soon became their leader. But the truth remained as far away as ever.

Then one night, sitting alone under a tree, he realised that for many years at home he had been seeking self-satisfaction by means of indulgence; then he had been seeking to satisfy his thirst for truth by means of self-mortification. Both were extremes of the same search for himself. Thus he reached the very basis of his quest: what is this "self"? And the answer he found to this question is the most fundamental teaching of Buddhism that there is no self! But that needs some explanation.

For 45 years thereafter during his life-time, and up to now, he is called the Buddha that is the one who saw the light of truth. Seeing the truth for himself, he spoke of it to many followers; and they have written down his sayings and sermons, which now form the traditional texts of Buddhism. These texts are not inspired, have no origin in divine revelation, but are only pointers on the way for others to follow. The Buddha is no savior, he cannot bestow grace, he is no more. One cannot pray for his favours, but his teachings are still with us. These teachings we can repeat; but if we do not follow them as instructions, they are powerless to help us. Thus, ultimately, in Buddhism each one is his own savior.

It is all really very simple, for it begins and ends with seeing things as they truly are, each one for himself. Thus there are no beliefs and dogmas, there are no systems of faith, of hope, and hence not of fear. If there is fear, it is the outcome from not seeing things as they are, just as a child is afraid of things it imagines to see in the dark.

On this firm basis of facts and events is then grounded a rational philosophy, a sound empiricism, a natural morality, in other words a way of living sanely in this world in relationship and in peace, which is more than any other religion has been able to provide during the last five thousand years.

Change

Now, what is the first fact that strikes one when we look around us and when we try to find our place in relationship thereto? The most obvious fact is that everything moves, grows, changes. Everything is in motion; and without motion there just is no life. Sometimes this motion is as slow as the process of evolution and the formation of continents with their mountain ranges, or as minute as the movement of electrons in an atom, invisible to the eye but none the less real. The movement of change is all around us, and is so universal that our greatest problem is to slowdown that change if we cannot stop it altogether. Thus we build our houses better and stronger, and we protect our health with improved medicines, we invest in durable property; all with a view to increasing our stability, continuance and security. And that has become the core of our living, a life in search for what is not, for we know through the experience of history that there is no stability and endurance even in the mightiest empires. We may seek for an explanation thereof in systems of dialectical materialism, or in religious beliefs, or in the will of God; but explanations are only thoughts, ideas or ideals, and they do not alter the fact that everything is impermanent, and the fact that we want continuance.

It is this wanting of continuance, this desire for security, this search for stability, which causes the friction in the mind, the conflict between being and becoming, the problem of searching and wanting, of striving and grabbing, of craving and clinging, which has made of life one big process of egoism and exploitation, of chaos and hate, which has turned love into self-love. We have our ideals of family- affection and patriotism, but if we are truly honest, they are all centered around that concept of the “I”, the self which must endure if it wants to exist at all, which has to become if it wants to be: it is my country for which I fight; it is my family for which I work and exploit others who are not mine.

It is then this search for the security and stability of "self" which causes the constant friction with all that moves and changes, grows and perishes. And in that friction between impermanence and the desire for permanence there is set up a greater isolation of self in opposition to others, greater conflict, greater problems, greater chaos, involving not only the individual mind, but the entire economic, political, and religious world. The individual is too small, too weak to stand alone against a universal onslaught of impermanence; and so he enlarges this concept.

Physically he joins a group, the members of which have similar views, politically or for the sake of recreation, socially or religiously. Now he is backed by an institution and is supported by the mass, the organisation, the party. He belongs to a greater unit and thus he enlarges his interest and influence. If, however, there is something in the organisation which does not suit his ego (and that may be a mere quarrel with an office-bearer) he will join another group.

Spiritually, however, this cannot advance him much, and so his desire for continuity and endurance seeks satisfaction in ideas and ideals. Belief in an eternal soul is a common dogma in all religions, and such soul-idea satisfies the desire for a life to come. In that future and ideal life the soul will be eternal and in bliss in the everlasting presence of an almighty God-creator, an enlarged concept of the loving father ideal, enlarged beyond all proportions into an infinite, omniscient, omnipotent God to accommodate the concept of the everlasting soul.

Thus the search for security has created this image of a supreme refuge in which the impermanent hopes to escape into a permanency of self-continuance without problems and without conflict. The search, therefore, is by a self-in-fear for a self-in-hope, without even an attempt to understanding that this very escape may be the cause of conflict.

Now here we have what are called in Buddhism the three characteristics or essential marks of distinction on which the entire teaching of the Buddha is based. All things are impermanent (*anicca*) which is an undeniable fact. Everything is in conflict (*dukkha*) which is also a fact, because everyone is trying to escape from this. And everyone strives for an escape from that conflict and be secure in his self-deception, when there is no "self" (*anatta*). Thus, as long as there is this self-deception there will be conflict in an attempt to escape from what is not endurable. And here we have come to the most essential feature of Buddhism, which is not found in any other religion: the distinguishing mark of soullessness.

Soul

Soullessness means just what it says: there is no soul. And to understand this, we must know what is meant by a soul.

A soul is the supposed living principle which not only gives life to a human body and makes it move and think and act, but which is supposed to survive the body after physical death, to enjoy, or not, the results of the actions of that physical life. Such a soul is eternal in the future although it had a beginning in creation. (This is the first contradiction in religious dogmas, to which point we may come back later when speaking of evolution.) That life is possible without a soul is proved by the acceptance of life in animals, which live and die and do *not* survive in heaven or in hell. The concept of a soul as a separate and surviving entity is really not different from the concept of a substance as an abstract entity supporting the various phenomena which can be seen and experienced. Thus we all know what iron is, but in fact, we only know iron nails, wrought iron railings, cast iron wheels, etc. We know that iron is a metal; but so are gold, silver, copper, lead and tin. We know that those metals are elements, and we have heard that elements are the basic nature of the varying phenomena. But, chemically, they defy analysis and can only be experienced in the many forms in which they appear, iron as ore, as steel, as individual instruments, etc. Now, is there a "substance" of iron apart from all those properties or phenomena? It is obvious that the distinction is purely conceptual, and that any "change" of appearances which does not affect the elements is merely a change in denomination, that is a change of name given to it by my mind. Do those properties of iron belong to the abstract iron, or do they not altogether constitute iron as a metal? Form, weight, etc. may change, and they do change constantly, but is there underneath a "substance" which remains unchanged?

What we experience are only the factual phenomena, and without those properties or constituents there is no substance, no proprietor, no underlying entity or principle. Abstract concepts have no factual existence. And so, there is no justice or goodness, although there may be many just and good men; there is no substance apart from the phenomena; no entity apart from its qualities; no principle of life apart from living; no thought apart from thinking, just as there is no walker apart from walking.

This approach to the concept of a "self" is bound to revolutionise one's entire way of thinking and living, as it forms the basis of philosophy, theology, morality, social relationship, eschatology, as much as it does in physics and chemistry, botany and zoology. If metals can change, plants decay and animals die without the need of a moral support for continued existence, it is obvious that it is this desire for continued existence which has invented the theory of an individualistic soul to live on after death, the theory of an everlasting God to provide security for such souls.

That physical life is possible without a soul is never doubted. Why then should there be a spiritual soul to account for man's intellectual prowess? "I" want a "soul", because "I" want to remain "I". The animal is already developing in the same direction by evolving its herd instinct, whereby the herd becomes the greater "I" in which the individual survives for the propagation of the species. Man in his cunning has gone far beyond and is now exploiting the herd for the survival of his individual "self". Such is the great deception in which the "soul" is invented to make the individual survive, in which "God" is invented to create such souls and to look after them for all eternity. Such self-deception comes obviously in conflict with nature, which is naturally impermanent, moving, changing, growing, decaying, becoming, ceasing without entity, without substance, without soul, without God.

It may sound at first somewhat involved, but it is really very simple: There is constant change; I do not like this change because it cannot provide the security I want; thus the ego invents a permanent entity or substance or soul, in order to continue as it is; it is the conflict between the ideal and the real. Now all our endeavor is to make the real into the ideal; but as the ideal is only a piece of my way of thinking, there is bound to be constant friction. If now, instead of trying to change the real into our ideal, if we give up the ideal for what it really is, viz. a piece of wishful thinking, then we can perhaps make a fresh start by seeing things, events and people as they are, and not only as we want them to be.

Seeing

How do we see things, events and people usually? We all have the background of our education and environment, which is not just the few years of our schooling, but which is the sum-total of our beliefs, traditions and customs of race, prejudices of nationality, attachments to memories, hopes for the future, fears for public opinion, needs for to-morrow, all of which have conditioned our way of thinking for the last so many thousands of years. In fact, it is all that which makes the "I". Without those memories of the, past there is no making of the future; without memory I shall not be able to find my way home, I would not even know my own name, I would not know who I am. In fact, indeed, "I" am that memory, and that memory is the "I". And that "I" must now continue; for what is the purpose of existence, what is the point of striving, if there is no continuance in the future?

And, yet, to see and understand things clearly, there must be no prejudice, no distortion, no conditioning, no hope, no fear, no expectation, no attachment, no judgment, no approval or rejection, that means no "self"; for all those things are the actions or rather the reactions of the "I" which we have seen now already to be a mere fiction, a projection of wishful thought.

Thus, with a completely new mind, a totally open mind, there can be a direct approach to life as it is. And that is what we are going to do now.

What is life? We are not discussing just now what life is biologically. We know the facts of life, of birth, of death; but that is knowledge which can be learned from books of reference, and that again is reference to memory. But, life as a living experience, as we are living just now, what is my life? Where everything is change, living too is a constantly changing experience, a succession of street corners, with new contacts, new views, new relationships. To live is to be related. And what I make of life is dependent on the manner of my approach to that relationship. If I meet someone and allow myself to be led by prejudice, there is no meeting at all because I see only my idea, my concept, my prejudice; and within that framework the other one is judged, classified and related to the background of my memory, where there is knowledge, but no understanding. With- out understanding there is no real contact, as I have only met with the picture already in my mind. That is, of course, a distortion, and any subsequent action is only an imperfect reaction thereto. Such action is technically called "*karma*". and the reaction is called "*vipāka*".

Most of our actions are really reactions, because they are conditioned reflexes, influenced and induced by motives, purposes, intentions and the like. Very often it is the purpose which sets action into motion; and then of course, the purpose is more important than the action, which is thereby reduced to a mere instrument towards the achievement of a goal. But a purpose or a goal is only an idea, a mental picture; and back again we are in the merry-go-round in search of an ideal which is an escape from the real, from what is. This merry-go-round is the vicious circle referred to as rebirth.

Rebirth

The concept of rebirth is very closely connected with that of *karma*, because it is seen as the reaction, that is the result of action. For an action to become effective with the resultant as envisaged, it must naturally be a planned action with volition and purpose. The aim of an action, however, reduces the act itself to an instrumental condition, keeping, the aim in view as the final goal and its ultimate cause. And so, an action done with an ulterior motive is not a straight action at all; it is crooked, wrung, wrong, unskillful, lacking, understanding. And in its incompleteness it will seek for fulfillment again. Such reaction was perhaps not intended, but it is there all the same as the result of misunderstanding, of ignorance, of a deluded mind. A mind which is full of thought of self-aggrandisement will naturally produce corresponding actions and reactions. Such actions are motivated by desire which may be lust or greed, or a desire for revenge which is self-love and hate.

Now, what happens to such activity, even when there is no continuance of a medium of transference? This is the difference between the Hindu concept of transmigration, where the soul moves on from existence to existence in an age-long process of purification, till finally ignorance is overcome and the Buddhist view of a soulless rebirth, in which action becomes reaction, a cause becomes effective, a question is answered, the old becomes the new not by passing on some of its essence, but by merely creating conditions in which the new arises and takes root. That is rebirth without transmigration, as there is no one to migrate.

This is called the doctrine of dependent origination, according to which nothing arises or happens without cause or condition, while its fleeting existence and its passing too depend equally on conditions. When conditions for arising do not prevail any longer, the effects also cease naturally.

The universality of this “law” of dependent origination and cessation makes the concept of an absolute beginning, such as creation, an impossibility. Hence there is no place for a creator or God, for he too must have his arising and cessation in the universal process of change and evolution.

Evolution is not a one-sided process of progressive improvement. There is no evolution without involution; there is no birth without death; no growth without decay. There is no beginning without an implicit cessation involved in the process of change.

Is there then no solution to bring this movement to a halt? It is the wish to bring this movement to a halt which causes the friction between the real and the ideal. On the other hand, if there is a complete understanding of this universal movement, or change, or process, or any other term you like, and if there is an intelligent co-operation instead of opposition, there will be a smooth flow without friction and without conflict. Why then is that not done? First of all, because one does not see and understand this so clearly, as one’s conditioning in the past has been so severe as to make a new approach almost impossible. To break away from these influences requires much courage, for it may mean that one has to stand alone without the support of age-long traditions and beliefs of established institutions. And that is certainly disturbing. Therefore, frequently one does not want to see things for oneself, but one may find it easier to rely on the authority of the past, of a sacred book, of the party’s manifesto, of the consensus of public opinion.

Moreover, one does not want to be disturbed as there is fear of losing one's security. To be alone, however, does not mean to be in opposition; but it means to be independent and free to act according to one's understanding. If one does not want to understand, there is nothing one can do about it. But if one sees the many absurdities one has to accept for the sake of not being disturbed, the impossible dogmas one has to accept in order to remain a faithful member of an institution, the childish actions one has to pretend to take part in for the sake of remaining in the game, religious observances, laws of morality, taboos, flag-hoisting, rituals in church and in society when one sees all that and understands it truly, is that not in itself an act of liberation? Should one not be glad to get rid of all that rubbish which prevents a free breath of air and living?

Beginning

In the long chain of conditionality (of dependent origination, as it is called in Buddhism), there is no ultimate beginning in time, for time is only the limitation of the individual, just as space is only the possibility of occupation. Neither has an independent existence. But, there can be seen a basic beginning which is not of time, which is the psychological foundation on which it all is based; and that is ignorance. It is in ignorance that ideas are born; it is in ideas that the individuality-concept is developed; it is in the individual that the senses come into contact; it is in contact that desires arise; it is desire that projects the concept of individuality into future becoming and in conflict. Thus, ignorance leads to conflict, whereas understanding would break the chain, when contact in the senses need not develop into craving for the object. When there is understanding of the object; when the object is seen to be without value in itself; when the object is seen as having value only for the subject; when the subject is seen as a mere bundle of conditioned reflexes, reactions to values which are meaningless in themselves—then the senses are free to contact, to see what there is to see without prejudice, without a sense of guilt or duty. And that seeing without attachment is understanding in an open mind. Then there is freedom and independence and the joy of living.

Here then we have a beginning less beginning, which seems at first hand an absurd contradiction. To an initial objection, that everything must have a beginning, and that one cannot go back in- definitely to a beginning without a beginning, one has merely to point out that that is exactly the position adopted by theistic religions, when they dogmatically believe that the world, the universe and man are created by God, but that God himself is not created, that he is eternal in existence, and infinite in duration.

Well, that is a contradiction; for, if everything must have a beginning, then where is the beginning of this creator?

When we try to see things without prejudice, forgetting for the moment what we have learnt from books and sermons, do we ever see anything with a beginning or with an end? In fact, we see only change. The chair on which we sit was made by a carpenter from wood taken from a tree. He only I changed the shape of the wood, while making it into a chair. The tree itself had no absolute beginning either, for it has grown from a seed which was nourished by the soil, the rain and the sunshine. And all those ingredients, so to say, have originated from other sources on which they were dependent his course of development, or evolution, is so long in duration and so vast in extent that the human brain, of the size of a big tea-cup, cannot comprehend the total process. But that is no reason for cutting the process down and declaring with absolute authority that "in the beginning there was God the creator of heaven and earth". If everything must have a beginning, what about him?

The next contradiction is that which is involved in the belief of an eternal soul, created by God at the beginning of an individual life-span, either at the moment of conception or infused some days afterwards, depending on the particular school of thought in fashion at the moment. However, they all agree that this human soul had some beginning, although they also all agree that it will not have an end. Apart from the fact that this cannot be proved either way, there is not even a shred of evidence for an acceptable proposition showing that a thing which must have a beginning in creation still manages to continue its existence in eternity.

The argument that everything must have a beginning is not convincing, as it is not applicable to the creator himself. It may be true that the human mind cannot conceive the idea of no beginning, but neither can it imagine a continuation without end in a perpetual motion machine, without wearing itself out in motion, or without replacing itself in parts and installments in a process of evolution and involution. But that, of course, would hardly be characteristic of a permanent substance, entity or soul. In fact, such is the Buddhist approach to life, in birth, in action, and in death, which is seen as a stream which essentially must flow on, or as a fire which essentially must burn, gathering in its process of combustion the fuel on which it depends, which makes its burn and which it consumes in turn. It is only when no more fuel is added that the process ceases. Thus, the senses will cease to proceed in greed when there is no more grasping, which is beyond need.

Greed

What is this grasping, this greed beyond need? Physical needs are as the law of gravitation and other laws of nature which are not really laws, but necessities which know no law.

And that never causes a problem until the human mind wants to overcome such need and invents machinery to satisfy his greed. The satisfaction of a need comes spontaneously, as the lungs provide the oxygen to the blood; but the satisfaction of greed is psychological. It is not the natural process of survival of the species through procreation, but the desire of the individual to continue personally, thereby acting in isolation and in opposition to nature for the satisfaction of its own selfish ends. It is this activity based on selfish ends which projects its purpose into a future; for it is only in continuance that existence can provide the satisfaction which the "ego" requires for its growth and expansion. It is this expansion of the "ego" which makes action reactive; which fertilises the conditions and makes them into causes to produce their effects. Such is rebirth without a soul to transmigrate, without an entity to reproduce, without a substance to carry over the burden of phenomena from life to life. Rebirth then is not an occurrence which takes place at the end of a life-span only, but it is the re-activation at any moment of conditions being reconditioned under a renewed stimulus of volition. The stimulus, as a challenge, may be taken or left, accepted or rejected, manipulated for a purpose which is always the projected thought of "self". Thus, sensations may become desires, as a seed may develop into a plant under the proper conditions of heat and moisture and nutriment. The nutriment of action is the search for satisfaction and security of the "I"-concept. And hence, when that concept is perceived as a delusion, it will not be conceived and action will not become a reaction. That is the cessation of becoming, the end of rebirth, through the understanding of no-self (*anatta*).

Understanding

Understanding, therefore, is the key-stone in Buddhist philosophy as well as in ethics. When there is understanding there is no need of faith and dogma, no need of rules and commandments, no need of incentives and hopes; when there is understanding, there is no fear, no opposition in relationship, no balancing between good and evil. But, for such understanding to arise, there must be a completely free approach with an open mind, which is sensitive in reception, unprejudiced in perception, unconditioned through conception, (*vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra*) so that there can be a direct awareness which sees things as they are, which is a freshly awakened intelligence from which direct action issues without purpose or aim or desire. It is the understanding of need which can prevent the development of greed. In understanding there is no search; in direct action there is no reaction; in seeing there is no striving. And that is the end of becoming, the end of the delusion of self, the end of rebirth. To this understanding there is no method of development, although the removal of obstacles to seeing is essential. But even the removal is not a process of development; it is not an action of destruction; for, he who sees his own folly is no longer a fool. But can a deluded mind dissolve its own delusion? Obviously, it cannot. But in the acceptance and acknowledgement of this impossibility there lies the cessation of any further escaping. An escape is a reaction to desire to become and that is self-delusion. Thought is constantly trying to escape in order to become, and thereby it creates the "I". When this is thoroughly understood, when it is seen that thought is the "I"- maker, that this thought is the inheritance of past memory trying to project itself into a future ideal of continuance, then thought cannot think any further. Then there is no projection in craving and no attachment in clinging; then there is neither future nor past. In this single moment of the present there is an experiencing when thought is silent, when the mind does not react to memory and ideal, when there is no "self". That moment of experiencing

without comparing or judging, is the moment of truth, when there is insight in what is, when relationship is not of exploitation but of selfless love, when virtue is not an exercise of duty, when concentration ceases in pure meditation and contemplation of what is.

Here then we have a new approach to an ancient doctrine, so ancient that even the Buddha did not claim to be its originator. Yet, in a sense he was, because he discovered this truth through his own insight. And that is also for us the only way to understanding. One can only see by seeing; one can only understand by opening one's mind. And that means the removal of obstacles which prevent seeing. But, neither the removal of obstacles nor the seeing of what is are parts of a process in time. It is time which is an obstacle, which postpones, which recalls, which compares and judges without seeing. It is time which builds a future and ignores the present; and it is in time that the delusion of a separate "self" hopes to continue. Thus, together with the delusion of the "I" there also fails the opposition of conflict, the reflection of the past, the projection of the future, to reveal only the present moment in which alone there can be experiencing without expectation, without hankering. In this experiencing to the full of what is, there is insight of direct understanding which is not the pleasure of memory, not the excitement of anticipation, but the pure joy of freedom, of being without becoming, of seeing without distortion, of living without fear and loving without "self".

It is that deliverance from all obstacles, of which ignorance is the strongest, which is called Nibbāna, because in that understanding there is no desire, no delusion, no "self".

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 Encyclopedia 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 center at Nilambe, Kandy, giving instructions to those who came to him for guidance on meditation.

He died on 15 September, 1988.