

# BUDDHISM AND THE VITAL PROBLEMS OF OUR TIME

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*The author, a non-Buddhist, steeped in Buddhist scriptures and sacred writings deftly touches upon some basic Buddhist beliefs about God. The Soul, The Meaning of Life. Cosmology, Rebirth, The Perfectibility of Man, and A Law-governed Universe etc.*

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Buddhism venerates as its founder the Indian Prince Siddhattha of the family of the Sakyas (c. 560-480 B.C.), whom His contemporaries were accustomed to call by His surname Gotama or by the honorific “Buddha”. The word “Buddha” means the Awakened, the Enlightened, and was applied to the Indian men of those times who were believed to have fathomed the mystery of the world and to have discovered the way to salvation, by their own efforts and not through revelation. The gospel of Gotama spread quickly over the whole of India in His lifetime and after His death, but fell into decay by about 1000 A.D., and had to give way, in the country of its origin, to Hinduism and Islam.

But Buddhism found ample recompense for this loss in Ceylon and Further India, in China, Japan, Tibet and Mongolia. The number of Buddhists in the Far East is estimated at 500 to 600 million, but this figure does not give a clear idea of its extension, since the acceptance of some of its doctrines or the observance of Buddhist customs is not incompatible with Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism and the various popular cults. For it has always been foreign to the spirit of Buddhism to claim exclusive validity. On the contrary, in its all-embracing tolerance, it has always lived peacefully side by side with other religions, and has absorbed ideas originally foreign to it, trying to permeate them with its own spirit.

Present-day Buddhism flourishes in two different forms. In Ceylon and Further India the original doctrine prevails, which is called the Lesser Vehicle, or *Hinayana*; in the Far East and the Tibetan cultural area this “simple doctrine” has undergone a significant broadening as regards philosophy and ceremonial. This is called the Great Vehicle to salvation, *Mahayana*. But the basic ideas of all forms of Buddhism have remained more or less the same, so that in our survey we need to take no notice of the differences in detail.

Among the world religions, Buddhism is the one whose area of influence lies farthest from the West, and also that which is most different in its doctrine from the teachings of Christianity and Islam.

## God

First and foremost, Buddhism does not teach the existence of any personal god who created and rules the world. It admits the existence of many gods; but these are only transitory beings with limited powers. They are born and pass away; they can exert no influence on the world process as a whole. Also, the great saints and saviours, the *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattavas* do not have the position which the Western religions ascribe to their one God. They can enlighten individuals, and according to the Great Vehicle, can lead them by their grace to the path of salvation. But they are not able to interfere with the cosmic process or change the world.

The Universe follows its own unalterable natural and moral laws. The most important of these is the law of *Kamma*, the law of retributive moral causality. This law says that every ethically good or bad action inexorably finds its reward or punishment, because the doer of the deed is born again after his death as a new being, and in that life reaps what he has sown in the previous life.

## The Soul

Another point of difference is this: both Western religions assume immortal souls created by God, which after death continue to exist in heaven or hell. Buddhism, however, denies that there can be anything in the world which persists unchanged. According to its theory, life is a stream of elements which are always coming into existence then cease to exist, and which influence each other according to certain laws. The life-stream of man continues after his death as a new being which has to pursue its happy or unhappy existence, as god, man, animal or inhabitant of hell, in accordance with the good or evil nature of his deeds. A life continues until the *kamma*, the power of the deeds which called the being into existence, is exhausted. Then, on the basis of the actions performed in that life, a new being comes into existence which is the heir of the previous life, and so on.

Since each life is the consequence of the actions of a previous life, no beginning of the world can be conceived. Since in each life new actions are performed which produce *kamma*, there can, in the natural course of things, be no end of the world. A few beings, however, succeed, through the knowledge of truth, in getting rid of the passions which are the root cause of the *kammic* process. They withdraw from the world, they enter *Nibbana*, into the great peace. But, however, many beings may enter *Nibbana*, the cosmic process will never come

to an end. For the number of beings who inhabit the infinitely vast number of worlds as animals, men, spirits, gods and inhabitants of hell, is infinitely great.

Thus, as little can be said about an end of the world as about a beginning. And with this we come to a third important point where Buddhism differs from Islam and Christianity. Both of these teach that the world was created by God out of nothing, that it remains under his governance for some thousands of years and that on the Last Day it will come to a definite end, when the dead will rise again, all men will receive their eternal reward or eternal punishment, and a new earth of eternal duration and splendour will be created. The ideas of a primordial creation and a definite end of the world are as foreign to Buddhism as that of a providential direction of cosmic events in accordance with a divine plan. It will be evident that, because of these divergences from the conceptions and dogmas of theistic religions, Buddhism must arrive at different answers concerning many of the questions which concern us here.

Before I proceed to discuss these questions, I must say a word about my own personal attitude towards Buddhism. I am not a Buddhist, but one engaged in Buddhist research. I have concerned myself for over thirty years with the Buddhist scriptures in the Indian languages, and have studied the principal Buddhist countries (except Tibet and Mongolia) at first-hand on three prolonged visits. In view of my knowledge of the Buddhist sacred writings, and the many discussions I have had with Buddhist monks and laymen, I believe I can answer these questions objectively and correctly in the spirit of Buddhism. I hope that in this way I shall be able to add to the understanding of a doctrine the study of which has been my life's work, and a knowledge of which, in my opinion, is necessary for anybody who seriously concerns himself with the various solutions which the riddle of existence puts before us.

### The Meaning of Life

(1) The first question which has been addressed to me is: "So far as we can see, both the life of the individual, and the history of mankind as a whole, proceed according to definite laws and indefinite phases. Apart from such causal regularities, has life any meaning which is comprehensible to us? Has man any definite task within this world? Or does this task merely consist in preparing himself to leave the world?"

"Regarded from the religious standpoint, is it ultimately unimportant how man behaves in this world? If not, where can he find directions as to his behaviour, and how can he know the validity of these directions? If the world has a comprehensible meaning, how is the suffering of innocent people to be explained?"

As I see it, there are in this group of questions no fewer than six separate questions. I shall answer them one by one.

(a) What is the goal of the cosmic process? According to the Buddhist view, which I have already outlined, this question cannot be answered. For Buddhism does not believe in a final state of things towards which history progresses. The cosmos is in eternal movement, and the numerous world systems of which it consists, pass periodically through the four phases of coming into being, existence, dissolution and non-existence.

### Cosmology

Buddhist cosmology usually starts by describing how an existing world which is ripe for dissolution, is emptied of its inhabitants. These beings, after death, are born again in another world, and the uninhabited world is destroyed completely by fire, water or wind. The world thus destroyed disappears for an enormous period of time, and there exists in its place only empty space. When the lawfully fixed period of non-existence comes to an end, there arises a new world system by virtue of the latent *kammic* power of the beings of the world which was destroyed. In empty space there first springs up a faint breeze which grows ever stronger finally, the heaven, worlds, earth and hell are formed. These are then populated with the beings who have had to live through the intervening period in other worlds.

At the beginning of such a newly arisen world, men are without sex. They are endowed with a radiant body, they hover over the earth's surface, and they need no physical nourishment. But because of curiosity they feed on the finer substance of the earth, they become earthbound creatures with gross and perishable bodies. Desire which grows ever stronger in them, causes them gradually to lose their original purity and virtue; they give themselves to bodily pleasures and quarrel with one another over their possessions which had so far been held in common. So that order may be re-established, property is introduced, and one man is installed as king. The need for a division of labour then leads to the formation of special callings and castes.

Over a period of millions of years, the natural and moral condition of the world deteriorates from generation to generation, so that human beings who in the beginning had an unimaginably long life, now never live beyond a hundred years. This position in which we find ourselves now, will in the future become still worse. At last Armageddon, "the time of the swords", breaks out, which lasts for seven days, during which the greater part of mankind is killed.

During this period of horror a few men have gone back to live in the forest, and subsist peacefully on fruit and roots. Taught by catastrophe, they are determined in future to live in a peaceful, moral life. Henceforth conditions

improve so that men become good and happy. This better state of things again lasts only for a time, and then decline sets in. Twenty periods of this kind, of falling and rising culture, follow in succession. When in the last, the twentieth period, the optimal point is reached, an emptying of the world from all living beings takes place, and finally its destruction, as described before. In this manner the cosmos undergoes continuous change, as in accordance with eternal laws many worlds, one after another, come into existence and pass away.

(b) Thus Buddhism knows no ultimate goal of world evolution. Nevertheless the world has a meaning. It is the ever-changing scene of the retribution of good and evil deeds (*Kamma*).

(c) The duty of man consists in the first place, to see to it that, through leading a moral life, he is reborn in a good environment, with a happy future. As a distant and supreme goal *Nibbana* beckons to the religious man, but it can be attained only after long purification. Hence the final task of man is to prepare himself to leave the world.

(d) From the foregoing, it follows that according to the Buddhist view the present conduct of man is of fundamental importance for his future fate. The entire Buddhist teaching is based on the belief in the moral structure of the universe. Such a belief not only rests on the conviction that everything good and evil will have its retribution and that it is possible for man continually to perfect himself but also presupposes that there exists an objective criterion of what helps man on the way to perfection and of what obstructs his progress.

The Buddha proclaimed an ethics of intention. What decides whether an action produces good or bad *kamma* is the intention which it is performed. Therefore actions which are not performed as the result of a moral decision, positive or negative, have no *kammic* results.

It is understandable that this lofty philosophical view has not been preserved for long. In the course of its history Buddhism has developed, in many different forms, the theory that the giving of gifts to monks, and the performance of certain sacred rites, produce a store of meritorious works. Indeed, in many of the schools of the Great Vehicle, ritualism has obtained such importance that the performance of magical rites, like the mechanical turning of prayer-wheels or the muttering of certain sacred formulae, have become a principal activity of the devotees. This is a regrettable, though understandable, degeneration, which indeed is not unknown in other religions.

Rebirth

(e) For the doctrine that good or evil deeds receive their reward or punishment in a new existence, Buddhists find empirical confirmation in this, that according to their opinion, men who have reached a certain height of spiritual development are able to recall their own previous lives and rebirths, and those of other beings. Since only a few individuals have reached so high a stage of spiritual maturity, the rest of us must rely on the testimony of these saints, just as those who have not visited a foreign country have to put their trust in the statement of reliable travellers.

First among processors of such knowledge come the Buddhas, i.e., men to whom, by virtue of the enlightenment they have attained, the connection between natural events and the moral realm has become evident. The word of a Buddha therefore ranks as the highest authority for all conduct; and from sayings of Gotama preserved in the holy scriptures, a Buddhist derives guidance for his life.

(f) The doctrine of moral causality offers the Buddhists an explanation why one man is distinguished, rich and happy, and the other lowly, poor and miserable. The fact that good men often fare badly, while evil men are happy, is explained according to the doctrine that the good men have still to expiate in this life the sins of a previous existence, while a bad man who has done good deeds in his previous life is now getting the reward for them.

(2) The second question which I have to answer from the standpoint of Buddhism runs thus; “If man has a normative ideal to which he has to conform, what are the conditions of life which guarantee him the quickest fulfilment of this task?”

According to the Buddhist view, man occupies an exceptional position among beings. He alone is in a position to question life itself and to achieve a transcending of it. Animals cannot do so, since they are wholly absorbed by the life of the senses. The heavenly beings also cannot do so, since because of their long life and the happiness they enjoy, the idea never occurs to them that life is transient and therefore unsubstantial and unsatisfactory.

As a consequence of this middle position in the hierarchy of living forms which man occupies, existence as a man is always considered as a rare piece of good fortune. On this point it is said: “The chance is as small as that of a blind turtle, emerging from the sea once in a hundred years, putting successfully its head straight into a single-necked basket – so small is the chance.”

Man should, therefore, make use of the precious boon which has fallen to his lot, and take care that he improves himself morally, in order gradually to attain perfection. A famous saying in the Dhammapada (v.183) shows the way to the fulfilment of this task: “Shun all evil, do good, and purify your own heart: that

is the teaching of the Buddhas". The avoidance of evil consists in not killing, not stealing, not lying, not committing fornication and not using intoxicating drinks which reduce man's mental capacity or deaden his sense of responsibility. He should, therefore, follow no calling in which he is bound to come into conflict with these postulates: he cannot be a hunter, a butcher, an executioner, a publican, and so on. It is easiest for him if he detaches himself from the world, and thus avoids its temptations. But only a few are mature enough to enter the monastery or to live as a pious hermit.

Thus the Buddhist ought not to be content with conditions as he finds them; he must try, wherever he can, to change them in accordance with Buddhist principles. Where that is not possible, his effort must be to make himself inwardly free from his environment so that he may detach himself from it and rise above it.

(3) We now come to the third question which raises the following problem:

"Are all men equal? If not, in what do they differ? In what respects is equality of all men desirable, and how far should existing differences be preserved?"

Since not even twins are completely alike in their abilities and their destiny, there can be in practice no complete equality of all men. Buddhism has therefore never tried to make all men alike. According to Buddhism mankind as a whole resembles to a certain extent a great pyramid, the broad base of which consists of the crude worldlings who are still far removed from the light of truth, while the narrow summit comprises only the few perfected ones. And between these two extremes, men are ranged in infinitely many degrees of virtue and knowledge. But for all of them, Buddhism tries to show the way to spiritual progress, by prescribing for them a spiritual diet for their individual needs. And just as it answers to the many different levels of comprehension of men, it also tries to adapt itself to the peculiarities of various cultures and races.

### The Amitabha Cult

In its eagerness to satisfy the most varied needs of people, the Great Vehicle in particular has taken over many features and conceptions which were originally foreign to Buddhism. Thus in East Asia today, the cult of Buddha Amitabha is very widespread. This mythical saviour calls to his heavenly paradise all those who, in their hour of death, in faith seek refuge in him; so that, being protected there from all evil influences, they can prepare themselves for Nibbana. Here Buddhism has adopted modes of thought from the theistic religions of divine grace. But in doing so, it has not abandoned its principle of an eternal cosmic law which governs everything, for Amitabha is only the bringer of good tidings into this sorrowful world. He has no part in creating or ruling it, for how could an omniscient spiritual being bring into existence this world full of pain, or hurl

the wicked down into the abyss of hell for their misdeeds, or condemn them to reincarnation in miserable forms of life?

Thus Buddhism acknowledges the differences among men in spiritual-religious matters, and has therefore presented its doctrine of salvation in the most variegated forms. On the other hand, it attaches no weight to differences of race, nationality, class or caste. In contrast to Brahmanism, it has not excluded wide sections of the people from its gospel of salvation, and entry to its order is open to all strata of society.

(4) The fourth question which has been put to me is this: "Which social institutions belong to the foundations of mankind and which are susceptible of alteration and development without causing harm to what is truly human? How does it stand with regard to marriage, the family, the State, property, the right of self-determination of the individual, and so on?"

According to its doctrine that all things are in a continual process of change, Buddhism recognises no social institution as eternal or unalterable. While the Chinese consider the State an institution belonging to mankind from its earliest times, Buddhism holds that it arose at a definite period of the cosmic process and will later disappear. Caste, which for the Hindus rests on God-given foundations, is for Buddhism a system arising from the needs of the times and having value only for India. Likewise marriage, the family, and property are obligatory only for worldly men of a limited historical period. With the giving up of worldly life all these institutions lose their significance, the monk, who has renounced worldly life, has at least in theory, risen above these obligations.

It is not surprising that this standpoint, adopted by the Buddha and by the authoritative fathers of the Buddhist church, has been much modified in the course of history. Under the pressure of outside forces, Buddhism had to make concessions to the state in several countries, and the prevailing ideal of nationalism is not without influence on the thought of many Buddhists. It is well-known that in Japan, among many sects, loyalty to the monarch and patriotism have become articles of religious faith, and that in Tibet a kind of theocratic state has arisen.

### No Central Authority

All these facts in no way alter the basic position which Buddhism adopts in relation to all earthly institutions. They have their value and their sphere of application at a certain stage; but for those who can see everything from a higher plane, they are in themselves only temporary means whereby order is maintained in the world.

As I understand it, Buddhism is a doctrine of salvation for the individual; the idea of a human collectivity, which has sinned and can be redeemed, is alien to



it. Therefore, it has no central authority which claims the right of issuing orders or proclaiming dogmas binding on all the Buddhists of the world. When the Buddha lay on His death-bed and was asked who henceforth would lead the community, He said “In future the *dhamma* will be your master.”

It is clear that this pronouncement of the Exalted One had various unfortunate consequences for the community. For the absence of a generally acknowledged supreme spiritual authority had the result that very soon after the Nibbana of the Perfect One dissensions arose over the interpretation of controversial points in the doctrine or over individual cases of monastic discipline, and that again and again new sects appeared.

Buddhism has accepted this with open eyes, for the right of self-determination of the individual and of the local congregation represented by the monastic chapter, have always seemed to it to outweigh these disadvantages. How far-reaching this right of self-determination is, can be seen from the fact that it not only was, and is open to the layman, under certain conditions, to enter at any time into the circle of devotees of the Exalted One, and to leave it again but it was and is even possible to belong at the same time to other religious communities and cults. The monk was always free to leave the order, and it often happened that people repeatedly during their lives became monks and returned to the world again.

In the twenty-five centuries of the history of Buddhism one naturally comes across instances in which the conditions described here have undergone modification for a time. But in general both the Lesser and the Great Vehicle have maintained the basic principle of the right of self-determination.

## Buddhism and Politics

(5) The fifth question addressed to me runs as follows:

“As far as it appears possible and necessary to alter institutions, how far and by what means is it permissible to act against the existing system and its defenders? When may cooperation be refused in the undertakings carried on by the current holders of powers? When is obedience to the conventions of the society into which one was born, obligatory?”

The answer to this can be given briefly. Since Buddhism tried to establish a spiritual order, which is not for this world, it does not claim to be a protagonist of social reforms. It is a common error to believe that the Buddha wished to destroy the caste system in India: He did not interfere with the social order as it existed, when He laid down that caste differences should no longer be observed within His order. This was no innovation, for this principle was observed among other Indian ascetics.

To change existing conditions by violence must appear to all Buddhists completely opposed to the teaching of the Master. For any exercise of brute force is alien to the merciful spirit of the pure doctrine. The Buddha condemned any thought of hate-inspired retaliation (Dhammapada 3.5).

Certainly, departures from this hallowed principle occurred but in the whole course of Buddhist history they play no important part. It has, therefore, never known either a social revolution, nor crusades, nor wars of religion. The struggle against conditions which were found to be oppressive, and against the unrighteous claims of the mighty, was therefore conducted in a peaceful manner by way of passive resistance.

### The Perfectibility of Man

(6) The answer to the sixth question will also not occupy us long. The question is as follows:

“Is man capable of changing, transforming himself, induced by instruction or revelation, and has he perhaps that capacity even to an unlimited extent? And which are the limits of his capacity to become good and wise?”

Buddhism does not recognise any fundamental difference between the children of light and children of darkness, foreordained to eternal bliss or to eternal damnation. On the contrary, it assumes that there are infinitely many stages in spiritual development, and in the achievement of them, beings rise or fall in accordance with their actions performed in the course of their rebirths. The story of the robber-chief Angulimala who had committed many murders, shows that a man may, by virtue of right instruction, evolve from a criminal to a saint in the course of one existence. Converted by the Buddha, Angulimala became an Arahant and entered Nibbana.

That even the worst sinner can finally attain perfection is also shown by the story of the Buddha's cousin Devadatta. This man committed the two worst sins known to Buddhism: he had sought, inspired by ambition, to murder the Buddha, and he had brought about a schism in the order. As a punishment he died of a haemorrhage and went to hell. When he had atoned for his misdeeds by staying in hell for a hundred thousand aeons, he would be purified of evil, and finally attain enlightenment and become a Solitary Buddha. The belief in man's unlimited capacity for change could hardly go farther than that.

The related question, whether all beings have the capacity, in the course of their rebirths, to become wise and good and thereby finally attain deliverance, was not answered by the Buddha. Later teachers expressed themselves on this subject in various ways. While many seem to have accepted such a belief, others thought that there are beings who are by nature incapable of assimilating

the highest knowledge, and therefore must remain forever subject to the cycle of rebirths.

### Buddhism and Modern Science

(7) I now turn to the seventh and last question. It runs: “How far is contemporary science in harmony with the teaching of Buddhism, or in contradiction to it?”

Buddhism originated 2500 years ago in India, and until the beginning of the last century it was confined to countries which were entirely untouched by modern science. It, therefore, goes without saying that many of its doctrines so far as they touch upon scientific, cosmological, and geographical matters, are irreconcilable with the results of modern Western science. It was born and grew in an era when an unlimited credulity prevailed; if we read the holy scriptures as we should read works of later times, in the spirit of literal history, we shall find things which do not fit into our modern picture of the world. We read that the Buddha was conceived by His mother miraculously, that He was able to fly through the air to Ceylon three times, that He increased food by magic, walked on water, and so on. And similar miracles are reported of His followers and of later saints: visions, magical cures, fantasies and the like, in short, almost all those things which were natural to the mode of thought of antiquity and mediaeval times in all parts of the world.

### A Law-governed Universe

Notwithstanding many such features, so strange to us, we do on the other hand, find much, even in the old texts, which strikes us as quite modern.

(a) First of all is to be noted the principle of general conformity to natural law which rules the whole Buddhist system. Again and again it is said: “This basic principle stands firm, this universal conformity to law, the conditioning of one thing by another” (Samyutta, 12-20-4). “Profound is this law of dependent origination. Since it does not know, understand or grasp this law, this generation has become confused, like a ball of thread” (ib. 12. 4). But a well-trained disciple ponders thoroughly the dependent origination, for he knows thus: “When that is, this comes into being: through the destruction of that, this is destroyed” (ib.12. 41-51, etc.).

(b) A further point of agreement is its positivistic character. For the Buddhist doctrine denies the existence of eternal substances: matter and spirit are false abstractions; in reality there are only changing factors (dhamma) which are lawfully connected and arise in functional dependence of each other. Like Ernst Mach, the Buddha therefore resolves the ego into a stream of lawfully cooperating elements, and can say with him: “The ego is as little an absolute

permanent entity as the body. The apparent permanence of the ego consists only in its continuity.”

In the philosophy of the Great Vehicle, Buddhism goes to the point of denying the reality of the external world. It is characteristic of the philosophical spirit of Asia that such epistemological doctrines do not, as with us, remain without close relation to the true religious life, but enter deeply into it and occupy the thought of wide circles. The consistent idealism of the theory of “Consciousness only” forms the basis of the Zen sect, widespread in China and Japan, which tries through meditation to realise the “void” which is above contradictions; and is also the basis of the priestly magic and mysticism of Tibet.

(c) It resembles modern modes of thought when the Buddha teaches that there are many problems that man, with his limited intellectual capacity, will never be able to solve, but in his cogitations about them entangles himself again and again in contradictions concerning problems such as the workings of *kamma*, the nature of the world, the question whether the world is eternal or not, finite or infinite, how the vital principle connects with the body, and what is the state of the saint who has entered Nibbana.

(d) Buddhism also agrees with modern science in its picture of a universe of vast spatial extent and unending time. The Buddha taught that there exist side by side infinitely many world systems which continually come into existence and perish again. It is not that He anticipated Copernicus; for each world system has an Earth at the centre, and sun, moon and stars revolve round it. It is rather that the conception of a multiplicity of worlds appears in His teaching as the natural consequence of the principle of retributive causality of actions. The number of actions which have to find reward or punishment is so infinitely great, that the appropriate retribution could not be comprised within one world, with its regular alternation of rising and falling cultural levels.

(e) Buddhism finds itself again in agreement with modern biology in that it acknowledges no essential difference, but only a difference of degree, between man and animal. However, it is far from the Darwinian line of thought.

(f) Finally, it can also be said that the Indians discovered the unconscious earlier than the Western psychologists. For them the unconscious consists in the totality of the impressions which slumber in the individual as the inheritance from his previous existence. The Buddhist technique of meditation, which is concerned with these latent forces, is thus a forerunner of modern psychoanalysis, of autogenic mental training, etc.

The attitudes of present-day Buddhists towards modern science vary. So far as I can see three attitudes can be distinguished.

(a) The great mass of Buddhist laymen and monks in Asia are still untouched by the modern natural sciences. For them the words of the Buddha and the commentaries on them are still the infallible source of all knowledge of the universe and its phenomena.

(b) Many Buddhists try to prove that the cosmological ideas and miraculous stories of the Canon conform to fact, and interpret the texts in an artificial sense or draw upon the assertions of modern occultism as proofs. It is not worthy that they do not consider miracles to be violations of the law of nature brought about by a supernatural power, but assume that there are unknown forces which cause events that appear as miracles to us but are really not.

(c) Other Buddhists again regard the statements of the text on natural phenomena as conditioned by the ideas prevailing in those times and therefore no longer authoritative. They say that the Buddha was not concerned to put forward a scientific world-view valid for all time, but that the essential core of Buddhism is rather its practical doctrine of salvation. The Buddha always maintained that everything of this earth is transitory, unreal and therefore unsatisfactory and that so long as man is still under the subjection of the three cardinal vices of hatred, greed and ignorance he will never attain inner peace and serene clarity of vision. Only through purification from all desires and complete realisation of absolute selflessness, through a moral conduct of life and constant practice of meditation, can be approach a state in which he lives in peace with himself and with the world. Man can elevate himself and raise his stature by emulating the great example of the Buddha seated in calm meditation, whose face shines in triumphant peace. Then man can lift himself above the fierce current of time, up to the imperishable state that is beyond all the unrest of the inexorable nexus of Becoming and Suffering. And the ideal that presents itself here is that unshakable composure of mind which a Buddhist verse describes.

He whose mind is like a rock,  
Firmly anchored, shakes no more,  
Who has escaped from all passion,  
Is no more angry and no more afraid,  
He whose mind is thus without equal,

How can sorrow defeat him?

(*Udana* 4.4)

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