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The Essence of Buddhism (by P. Lakshmi Narasa)

Buddhism teaches that indolence is defilement, and strenuousness is the path to immortality. He sternly refused admission to slothful men in his order. Indolence is the disease underlying all other moral diseases. He who frees himself from the disease of sloth will free himself from all other moral diseases.

Aristotle says: "The wise man seeks after freedom from pain, not pleasure." -

When the Blessed One was asked to declare what he regarded as the blessings of life - He replied:

"The succouring of mother and father,
The cherishing of child and wife,
The following of a peaceful calling,
This is the greatest happiness blessing.

"Acts of charity, a pious life,
Aid rendered to your kin,
And actions that are blameless,
This is the greatest blessing.

"Self-discipline and purity,
The comprehension of the four Great Truths,
And the attainment of Nirvana,
This is the greatest blessing" - Mangala Sutta.

The Karma teaches that life would not be worth living, if its goal were the mere satisfaction of egoistic desires. If happiness in the eudaemonistic sense were the ideal of human life, it were better to return to the savage, if not animal, state.

It's doubt civilization and culture have removed many evils and created many new comforts, but with them also have come into existence many new previously unknown sufferings, which are becoming keener and more intense with advancing refinement and increasing sensibility. While the animal suffers from actually existing pain, man's reason makes him multiply his afflictions by anticipation and lamination. As Rant said; if the special purpose of a being endowed with reason and will were only its self-preservation and prosperity, or in a word, its happiness as ordinarily understood, the creature has been badly equipped to secure the end in view. A pig with its instincts is perfectly happy, while a Socrates highly endowed with reason is always unhappy. Accordingly, the goal set before man by the Karma is not happiness but perfection. "And who love perfection? Is it the pleasure-loving, or the pain-taking? The right answer is: the faintest, not the easy-going." But he who attains perfection also enjoys the bliss arising from the complete realization of his being. In one place the Buddha says: "Of those that live happily in this world I am also one." - As the Dhammapada says, he who attaches himself to

Teaching of Buddha lives happily free from ailments among the sorrowful, free from weeping among men sick at heart, free from greed among men swayed by greed, free from ill-will among the hating. He who has overcome all hindrances brightens the world like the moon free from clouds, and like the celestial feeds upon changeless bliss.

- fine - rasayna, yugamasthi, isuroos by theore - 100 -

Expire - poriate, garbaited -

- An aspiration that is not accompanied by a firm resolution to attain it, cannot be productive of any good. - The determination must proceed neither from ambition, nor from thirst of glory, nor as a means of gaining heaven, nor from the desire to secure supreme and everlasting bliss for oneself, but solely from the desire to secure the benefit of others. This resolve must make the aspirant say: "I shall not retreat, I shall not be dependent. It is not for me a matter of option, as I have taken the resolution of leading all creatures to the other shore. I have to bear the burdens of all creatures." (Kajradraja sutra). It is with this firm resolve to attain Bodhi that the aspirant must enter on the prescribed course of self-culture and self-control.

Aspirations and resolutions will be a little void, if they are not followed by practices which can secure the end in view?

The inertia of Karma, the resisting force in which our past actions

are stored up, cannot be overcome by mere aspiration. The inner life of the individual will become strengthened only when it energises into the external world as activity. Consequently, right aspirations must find objective manifestation in right speech, right action and right living. —

In Buddhism the moral life is of fundamental importance. It is the attitude of mind that measures the merit of a charitable act.

The Blessed One has said: "The Shramanas and Brahmanas, who say that ideas appear and disappear in man without cause or antecedent, are grievously deceived. — By education certain ideas arise while others are unrolled." / Digha-Nikaya V.I. p. 170. /

— The mind must therefore be guided in the right direction. It is the mind that creates fears and sorrows, that develops good and bad Karma. As the Blessed One has said, all penances and austerities will be of no avail even when practised for an extraordinarily long time, if the mind is not directed towards the right object. — On the mind depends the practice of dharma, and on the practice of dharma depends the attainment of Bodhi.

"The mind is the origin of all that is; the mind is the master; the mind is the cause. — It is the mind that creates its own sorrow. Hence the mind must be guarded from being affected by bad

Man must always practice right thought. He must know what ought to be avoided and what ought to be done. He always must be mindful as to how his mind and body are engaged. Only he who is capable of thought will see his sin to be sin and make amends for it as is meet and in future restrain himself therefrom.

The man devoid of thought is like an invalid incapable of doing work. The exercise of right thought can be possible only when one possesses intellectual insight and wisdom. (pragna).

- It is a glory of Buddhism that it makes intellectual enlightenment an essential condition of salvation. In Buddhism morality and intellectual enlightenment are inseparable from one another. While morality forms the basis of the higher life, knowledge and wisdom complete it. Without a perfect understanding of the laws of causality and transformation no one can aspire to attain Bodhi, however moral he may be. It is one can even be said to be truly moral, if he does not possess the necessary insight and knowledge. In this respect Buddhism differs from all other religions.

- Pragna means ratiocination based on observation and experience, and as such has nothing to do with intuition or what is called superconsciousness.

Dhyana, as understood in Buddhism, is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view, and as such plays an important part. - Dhyana is of the mind which leads finally

to a state in which the mind is flooded by an illumination which reveals the universe in a new aspect absolutely free from all traces of interest, affection or passion.

Dhyana is thus a self-jessed purposive eradication of egotism with a view to investigate all things dispassionately. It is a strenuous endeavor to bring the mind into perfect harmony with all that exists, to see the place of everything in nature and adjust one's actions righteously towards them. Dhyana has, therefore nothing in common with ecstasy or trance which is found so largely associated with religious mysticism and is claimed to afford supernatural powers and insight into the divine. - Though dhyana may have its physical and hygienic side, it is predominantly intellectual and ethical, its chief purpose being to understand the true nature of consciousness and therefore of man. The yogin par excellence in Buddhism is the glorious Bodhisattva who practices the six paramitas.

- Scepticism is often nothing more than a cloak in which ignorance masquerades. Scepticism is not an attitude of mind, but an internal maladjustment denoting psychic instability. Scepticism is not an attitude of mind, cannot regenerate men; it can only kill but not give life. Only faith in a new ideal will impel men to move forward in search of a new life.

Morality is the supporting ground of all eminence, as the earth is of the moving and the immovable" - Nagarjuna (Subhillekha).

"What is reborn," says Milindapanha, "is name and form. But it is not the same name and form. By one name and form deeds are done, and by these deeds another name and form is reborn. But that other is the result of the first, and therefore not thereby released from its evil deeds." As Buddhagosta says in his *Kandhamagga*, "those groups which came into being in the past existence in dependence on Karma, perished then and there. But in dependence on the Karma of that existence other groups have come into being in this existence. Not a single element of being has come into this existence from a previous one. The groups which have come into being in this existence in dependence on Karma will perish, and others will come into existence being in the next existence, but not a single element of being will go from this existence into the next. However, just as the words of the teacher do not pass into the mouth of the pupil, who nevertheless repeats them, and just as the features of the face do not pass to the reflection in mirrors and the like, and nevertheless repeats them, and just in dependence on them does the image appear; and just as the flame does not pass over from the wick of one lamp to that of another, and nevertheless the flame of the second lamp exists in dependence on that of the former; in exactly the same way not a single element of being passes over from a previous existence into the present existence, nor hence into the next existence; and yet in dependence on the groups, organs of sense, objects of sense, and sense

consciousness of the last existence were born those of this one, and from the present groups, organs of sense, objects of sense, and self-consciousness will be born the groups, organs of sense, objects of sense, and sense-consciousness of the next existence."

Here and there in the Pīṭakas may be found passages which appear to suggest that the Buddha admitted the transmigration of an actual entity from one birth to another. . . In these parables the aim of the Master was to teach the common people in a simple way the truth of the relation between action and its fruit. But the Blessed One never wanted to imply that one and the same person (personality) is reborn. Once a Brahmin, named Sāti, disputed with the other Brahmins that consciousness (vijñāna) persisted unchanged in the cycle of re-births. The Blessed One sent for him and asked him; "What is it you regard as consciousness, Sāti?" The latter answered: "That which as self, O Master, enjoys again and again the fruits of good and bad actions." The Buddha then admonished him thus: "From whom last thou, deluded man, heard that I have taught such a doctrine? Have I not in many ways explained the conditioned nature of consciousness? Without sufficient cause arises no consciousness." The teaching of the Dharma concerning Karma cannot be clearly understood except in the light of what the Blessed One has taught us to the nature of personality. What is essential in personality is not the "I" but the content. This content is never for two moments the same. What serves to conserve this content is continuity, and it is this that

gives rise to the illusory idea of identity ... Strictly speaking, man is dying every moment. But so long as the mode of association of the elements which constitute the ego remains largely the same, we speak of the ego as the same. But really at one moment it is one ego, and at the next moment it is a different ego, though connected with the former by certain links. It is the continuity of thought that gives rise to the oneness. What determines the connection between the doer of a deed and the enjoyer of its fruit is also this continuity of thought. ... When a person dies, that is to say, when an ego ceases to have sensations, volitions, etc., the elements no longer occur in their customary mode of association, but the content of the ego is not lost. Having a few worthless personal reminiscences the content of an ego remains preserved in others. Thus the individual is preserved in news papers. It is one that dies, and it is another that is reborn. — "Na cha so, na cha anno" — it is not he, and yet it is not another. ... Life must necessarily mean, ... life consists in continual transformation and infinite duration of life must necessarily mean infinity of transformations and any such transformation will remove identity.

A science teacher, a particular person is not a discrete individual, but a focus to which converge and from which again diverge many physical and psychical activities. In him have been impressed samskaras by heredity, example and education. Only by a process of evolution do samskaras come into being. No samskara ever comes into being without

a gradual becoming. Embryology has revealed that the individual organism is the off-shoot of a germ-plasm which passes from generation to generation. The whole history of the development of an individual as observed in a highly organised animal, is a continuous chain of reminiscences of the evolution of all those beings which form the ancestral series of that particular animal. The history of no individual begins with his birth, but has been endless ages in the making. The assumption that each human being starts life for himself and commences a development of his own, as if the thousands of generations before him had been in existence in vain, is in striking discord with the facts of daily life. No human being can be regarded as something supernaturally added to the stock of nature; on the contrary, he must be treated as a new segregation of what already existed. No individual can wholly detach himself from his parent stock. "Each one of us bears upon him," as Rusby says, "obvious marks of his parentage, perhaps of remote relationship. More particularly the sum of tendencies to act in a certain way, which we call "character", is often to be traced through a long series of progenitors and collaterals. . . . In the new born infant the character of the stock lies latent, and the ego is little more than a bundle of potentialities, but very early, these become actualities; from childhood to age they manifest themselves in idleness or brightness, weakness or strength, viciousness or uprightness, and with each feature modified by confluence with another character, if by nothing else, character passes on to its immediate issue in new bodies."

No human being can completely sever himself from other human beings. Human beings form constituent units of society, not only by reason of the inter-dependence of their diverse external functions, but by reason of their mental inter-dependence. . . . It is indeed exclusively through psychical inter-dependence that human existence as such has been possible. It is through the mutual dependence of their minds upon one another that men are civilized, social and ethical beings. . . . Only in and through society does the individual make himself heir to the treasure of learning, science and knowledge, without which the life of the individual would only be very rudimentary. Every man leaves behind him whatever changes he has produced in his surroundings. . . . Since men are physically independent of one another, it does not follow that they are also psychically separate from one another. The psychical life continues beyond each individual, because its real subjects are not individuals as such, but the bonds uniting individuals. Every deed, every word, every thought is a part of our psychic life, and our psychic life remains unbroken, like an extinct flame that has kindled another.

Our present life is the repetition of past actions.

While the Karma lays stress upon Karma as the effect of past deeds, good or bad, it must not be forgotten that it also lays equal stress on the liberating power of education, on the perfectibility of human nature by means of self-culture and self-control. Buddhism is no fatalism.

Jacobin teaches that everything, including also the human will, has been pre-determined. It presupposes the existence of a person whose will is constrained by an external power. Hence a man's character cannot be improved by education. On the other hand, Utilitarian teaches that man himself is a product of causes. Hence his will cannot exist previous to his formation by these causes. Instead of being constrained by them, his will is made by them. Accordingly, the will can be made to acquire, by proper training the power to resist the will impulses. . . . For the Utilitarian the innate character is caused, and therefore furnishes the strongest motive for action.

The Utilitarian knows exactly what is meant by the reign of law in the universe. There are not first laws, and then things and phenomena subject to them. Laws represent the forms in which the relations of things are conceived by the human mind under generalised or simplified circumstances. The human mind is therefore, the proper lawgiver to the universe. Hence the submission to Karma, which Utilitarian applies ascribes to action, is not blind, but a discriminating submission. Karma is in form a creation of the mind which makes action itself an object of meditation. Accordingly a man is responsible for his actions, though his volitions are determined by causes. By the avoidance of all evil and the practice of the precepts, it is possible to attain "that realm on earth, where one may stand and be free from an evil deed absolved" -

The evil inclinations cannot be annihilated without the simultaneous development of the moral and intellectual powers.

Just as the seed becomes annihilated by its growth into the tree, so does egoism become extinguished by its development into altruism.

Salyasinta attained body at the age of Forty five and he spent the remaining forty-five years of his life in active preaching and doing good. Nirvana cannot therefore mean the annihilation of all activities. On the one side it is the destruction of the three fires of lust, hatred and ignorance; and on the other side it is the perfection of all human excellences. If it is annihilation, it is annihilation through growth. ⊕

The follower of the Vedanta, says the Blessed One, is like the monkey at the lake which tries to catch the moon in the water mistaking the reflection for the Reality.

Anitya, Anatman and Nirvana have been rightly called the three corner-stones of Buddhism. They form the three cardinal principles of ~~the~~ the Sharing. - Anitya means impermanence. It ^{highly} means that "all the constituents of being are transitory," that all things are in a perpetual flux. All things lived through, all "illnesses" are transient and impermanent. Nothing is permanent in the universe but change. Mutability is the very characteristic of all existence. The essential feature of all matter, whether living or dead is its instability. Permanent unchanging substances exist in our thoughts but not in reality. Whatever exists is made up of colours, sounds, temperatures, spaces, times, pressures, ideas, emotions, volitions and so forth, connected with one another in

manifold ways. And these are continually changing. Everything is therefore momentary. Some things may be relatively more permanent than others, but nothing is absolutely permanent. Modern science can discover nothing fixed in the universe. It is the mistaking of what is impermanent for something permanent that marks anitya the source of sorrow.

The logical consequence of the doctrine of 'anitya' is the principle "Anat mata". This principle lays down that nowhere in the universe, neither in the macrocosm, nor in the microcosm, there is an unconditioned, absolute, transcendent entity or substratum. All that we know consists of a flux of sensations, ideas, emotions, volitions, and so forth, associated with one another in various ways. Out of this fleeting complex texture rises into prominence that which is relatively more fixed and permanent, and impresses itself on the memory, and finds expression in language. . . .

Among the many comparatively permanent complexes we find a complex of memories, volitions, emotions, ideas, aspirations, linked to a particular body, which is called the ego or "I". But even the ego, as we have already seen, is relatively permanent. If the ego appears to be permanent, it is because the changes that occur in the elements, or the "shandhas", which constitute the "I" are comparatively slow. The mere fact that there is a consciousness of identity does not prove the existence of an "atman", which is the witness or possessor

of sensations, ideas, etc. When a man says that he has the sensation hot, it only means that the element of experience called hot occurs in a given group of other elements, such as sensations, memories, ideas, etc. (rupa, vedana, vijñāna, saṃyog, saṃskāra). When he ceases to have any sensation, that is to say, when he dies, then the groups, the skandas, are dissolved, the elements no longer occur in their ordinary accustomed grouping or association. That is all. What has really ceased to exist is a unity constituted, as already pointed out, for economical and practical purposes (samviti or vyavahārika), not a transcendental (paramārthika) unity. Each individual knows what changes his ego is understanding. Knowing the mutability of the ego, each one of us is striving to alter its attributes and improve it. . . .

Pondering on the problems of life and death, the Blessed One recognised that life starts in unknown-non-conscious potentialities with blind impulses, and that life's start is its own doing. It is this unconscious potency from which life starts, not knowing its whither, that is at the bottom of all evil. In his formula of "ādhyātmiķa prāptiḡa samutpāda" the Blessed One has succinctly expounded the various links (nidānas) in the chain of causation that leads to the full development of life as manifested in human beings. In the beginning there is unconscious potentiality (avidyā); and in this nebulousness of undefined life the formative and organising propensities (saṃskāras) shape crude formless aggregates.

From the materials thus produced originates an organism possessing awareness, sensibility and irritability (vignāna). From these develops self-consciousness, the unity which differentiates self from not-self, and makes organism live as individual beings (nāma rupa). With self-consciousness begins the exploration of the six fields of experience (śadāyatana), belonging to the five senses and the mind. The exploration of the six fields brings about the contact (sparśa) with the external world. The perception of the external world and the exercise of the senses and the mind thereon leads to the experience of different kinds of pleasure and pain (vedana). The experience of pleasure and pain generates in the individualised being, through not knowing its own nature, a grasping desire (tṛṣṇā) for its own individual satisfaction. The thirst for obtaining egoistic satisfaction induces a clinging (upādāna) to worldly pleasures. The indulgence in worldly pleasures produces the growth and continuation of self-hood (ahamkāra). Self-assertion manifests itself in incessant changes or births (jāti), and these incessant changes, looked at selfishly, become the sources of sorrow connected with sickness, old age and death (jarāmaraṇa). These give birth to lamentation, anxiety and despair. - Thus, the cause of all sorrow lies at the very source; it lies in the unconscious blind impulses with which life starts. When these blind impulses are checked and controlled, the wrong appetences born of them will no longer have sway; with the removal of these wrong appetences the wrong perception begotten by them will be wiped out. When the wrong understanding

of the world is wiped out, the egoistic errors peculiar to individualization will cease, and with the cessation of these the illusions of the six fields will disappear. Sense experience will no longer produce misconception. When no misconception arise in the mind, all grasping desires will cease, and with the disappearance of these will arise freedom from morbid cleaving and indulgence. When morbid cleaving and indulgence do not exist, the selfishness of selfhood disappears. When this selfishness is annihilated, there will be Nirvāna, the complete escape from all sorrow arising from birth, disease, old age and death and ignorance and evil desires. - It is therefore clear that the fate of each one of us rests in his own hands. If life is associated with suffering, no being has a right to blame another, much less Dharmakāya. It is not Dharmakāya that permits beings to suffer innocently for conditions which they did not create themselves. Life's suffering is life's own doing. He who knows the nature of life must not be afraid of suffering; he must bear it nobly. No one can turn aside the law which moves to righteousness. But one's personality becomes more vivid as it enters more and more closely into oneness with Dharmakāya. If one awaits oneself of the light of Dharmakāya, the essence of Buddhahood, ordering his life conformable to the Dharma and following the Noble Eightfold Path, one escapes the suffering that is associated with life and arrives at the blissful haven of Nirvāna. - He who has attained Nirvāna cannot live a life of selfhood confined to the attainment of individual

satisfactoriness. As the "Bodhisattvavyākaraṇa" says, it is with the desire to make all beings happy that one desires to attain "Bodhi". While Nirvāṇa uplifts the individual from the pettiness of this world, it does not estrange him altogether from the world. Only by a living and positive union with this world does Nirvāṇa attain its full significance as the highest thing in the world. If Nirvāṇa is living in harmony with the universal whole the bodhisattva can attain it only by acting in and through the lesser whole called mankind. — Just as a mother, at the risk of her own life, protects her only child, so does he who has attained Nirvāṇa cultivate good will beyond measure among all beings, towards the whole world, unstinted and unmixed with any feeling of making distinctions or showing preferences. The removal of the infinite pain of the world is his highest felicity.