CHAPTER II
The Four Noble Truths

The FIRST NOBLE TRUTH: DUKKHA

The heart of the Buddha's teaching lies in the Four Noble Truths (Cattāri Ariyasañcāri) which he expounded in his very first sermon to his old colleagues, the five ascetics, at Isipatana (modern Sarnath) near Benares. In this sermon, as we have it in the original texts, these four Truths are given briefly. But there are innumerable places in the early Buddhist scriptures where they are explained again and again, with greater detail and in different ways. If we study the Four Noble Truths with the help of these references and explanations, we get a fairly good and accurate account of the essential teachings of the Buddha according to the original texts.

The Four Noble Truths are:
1. Dukkha\(^2\)
2. Samudaya, the arising or origin of dukkha,
3. Nirodha, the cessation of dukkha,
4. Magga, the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH: DUKKHA

The First Noble Truth (Dukkha-ariyasacca) is generally translated by almost all scholars as 'The Noble Truth of Suffering', and it is interpreted to mean that life according to Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain. Both translation and interpretation are highly unsatisfactory and misleading. It is because of this limited, free and easy translation, and its superficial interpretation, that many people have been misled into regarding Buddhism as pessimistic.

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2. I do not wish to give an equivalent in English for this term for reasons given below.

<-- Meaning of "DUKKHA"

First of all, Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. If anything at all, it is realistic, for it takes a realistic view of life and of the world. It looks at things objectively (yathābhūtām). It does not falsely pull you into living in a fool's paradise, nor does it frighten and agonize you with all kinds of imaginary fears and sins. It tells you exactly and objectively what you are and what the world around you is, and shows you the way to perfect freedom, peace, tranquility and happiness.

One physician may gravely exaggerate an illness and give up hope altogether. Another may ignorantly declare that there is no illness and that no treatment is necessary, thus deceiving the patient with a false consolation. You may call the first one pessimistic and the second optimistic. Both are equally dangerous. But a third physician diagnoses the symptoms correctly, understands the cause and the nature of the illness, sees clearly that it can be cured, and courageously administers a course of treatment, thus saving his patient. The Buddha is like the last physician. He is the wise and scientific doctor for the ills of the world (Bhikkhu or Bhāratiya-guru).

It is true that the Pali word dukkha (or Sanskrit dukkha) in ordinary usage means 'suffering', 'pain', 'sorrow' or 'misery', as opposed to the word sukkha meaning 'happiness', 'comfort' or 'ease'. But the term dukkha as the First Noble Truth, which represents the Buddha's view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connotes enormously wider senses. It is admitted that the term dukkha in the First Noble Truth contains, quite obviously, the ordinary meaning of 'suffering', but in addition it also includes deeper ideas such as 'imperfection', 'impermanence', 'emptiness', 'insubstantiality'. It is difficult therefore to find one word to embrace the whole conception of the term dukkha as the First Noble Truth, and so it is better to leave it untranslated, than to give an inadequate and wrong idea of it by conveniently translating it as 'suffering' or 'pain'.

The Buddha does not deny happiness in life when he says there is suffering. On the contrary he admits different forms of happiness, both material and spiritual, for laymen as well as for monks. In the Anguttara-nikāya, one of the five original Collections in Pāli containing the Buddha's discourses, there is a list of happinesses (sukhāni), such as the happiness of family life and the happiness of...
the life of a recluse, the happiness of sense pleasures and the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of attachment and the happiness of detachment, physical happiness and mental happiness, etc. But all these are included in dukkha. Even the very pure spiritual states of dhyāna (recollection or trance) attained by the practice of higher meditation, free from even a shadow of suffering in the accepted sense of the word, states which may be described as unmixed happiness, as well as the state of dhyāna which is free from sensations both pleasant (sukha) and unpleasant (dukkha) and is only pure equanimity and awareness—even these very high spiritual states are included in dukkha. In one of the suttas of the Majjhima-nikāya, (again one of the five original Collections), after praising the spiritual happiness of these dhyānas, the Buddha says that they are ‘impermanent, dukkha, and subject to change’ (aniccā dukkhā viparītāmadhamma). Notice that the word dukkha is explicitly used. It is dukkha, not because there is ‘suffering’ in the ordinary sense of the word, but because ‘whatever is impermanent is dukkha’ (yad aniccaṁ taṁ dukkham). The Buddha was realistic and objective. He says, with regard to life and the enjoyment of sense-pleasures, that one should clearly understand three things: (1) attraction or enjoyment (assōda), (2) evil consequence or danger or unsatisfactoriness (ādinava), and (3) freedom or liberation (nissarana). When you see a pleasant, charming and beautiful person, you like him (or her), you are attracted, you enjoy seeing that person again and again, you derive pleasure and satisfaction from that person. This is enjoyment (assōda). It is a fact of experience. But this enjoyment is not permanent, just as that person and all his (or her) attractions are not permanent either. When the situation changes, when you cannot see that person, when you are deprived of this enjoyment, you become sad, you may become unreasonable and unbalanced, you may even behave foolishly. This is the evil, unsatisfactory and dangerous side of the picture (ādinava). This, too, is a fact of experience. Now if you have no attachment to the person, if you are completely detached, that is freedom, liberation (nissarana). These three things are true with regard to all enjoyment in life.

From this it is evident that it is no question of pessimism or optimism, but that we must take account of the pleasures of life as well as of its pains and sorrows, and also of freedom from them, in order to understand life completely and objectively. Only then is true liberation possible. Regarding this question the Buddha says:

‘O bhikkhus, if any recluses or brāhmaṇas do not understand objectively in this way that the enjoyment of sense-pleasures is enjoyment, that their unsatisfactoriness is unsatisfactoriness, that liberation from them is liberation, then it is not possible that they themselves will certainly understand the desire for sense-pleasures completely, or that they will be able to instruct another person to that end, or that the person following their instruction will completely understand the desire for sense-pleasures. But, O bhikkhus, if any recluses or brāhmaṇas understand objectively in this way that the enjoyment of sense-pleasures is enjoyment, that their unsatisfactoriness is unsatisfactoriness, that liberation from them is liberation, then it is possible that they themselves will certainly understand the desire for sense-pleasures completely, and that they will be able to instruct another person to that end, and that that person following their instruction will completely understand the desire for sense-pleasures.’

The conception of dukkha may be viewed from three aspects: (1) dukkha as ordinary suffering (dukkha-dukkha), (2) dukkha as produced by change (viparītāma-dukkha) and (3) dukkha as conditioned states (samkhāra-dukkha).

All kinds of suffering in life like birth, old age, sickness, death, association with unpleasant persons and conditions, separation from beloved ones and pleasant conditions, not getting what one desires, grief, lamentation, distress—all such forms of physical and mental suffering, which are universally accepted as suffering or pain, are included in dukkha as ordinary suffering (dukkha-dukkha).

1A (Colombo, 1925), p. 49.
2Mahādīkka-khanda-sūtra, M I (PTS), p. 90.
3M I (PTS), p. 83 ff; S III (PTS), p. 27 ff.
4M I (PTS), p. 87.
5Vism (PTS), p. 499; Abhisamuc, p. 38.
According to the Buddha’s teaching the beginning of the life-stream of living beings is unthinkable. The believer in the creation of life by God may be astonished at this reply. But if you were to ask him ‘What is the beginning of God?’ he would answer without hesitation ‘God has no beginning’, and he is not astonished at his own reply. The Buddha says: ‘O bhikkhus, this cycle of continuity (samsāra) is without a visible end, and the first beginning of beings wandering and running round, enveloped in ignorance (avijjā) and bound down by the fetters of thirst (desire, ṭanha) is not to be perceived.’ And further, referring to ignorance which is the main cause of the continuity of life the Buddha states: ‘The first beginning of ignorance (avijjā) is not to be perceived in such a way as to postulate that there was no ignorance beyond a certain point.’ Thus it is not possible to say that there was no life beyond a certain definite point.

This in short is the meaning of the Noble Truth of Dukkha. It is extremely important to understand this First Noble Truth clearly because, as the Buddha says, ‘he who sees dukkha sees also the arising of dukkha, sees also the cessation of dukkha, and sees also the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.’

This does not at all make the life of a Buddhist melancholy or sorrowful, as some people wrongly imagine. On the contrary, a true Buddhist is the happiest of beings. He has no fears or anxieties. He is always calm and serene, and cannot be upset or dismayed by changes or calamities, because he sees things as they are. The Buddha was never melancholy or gloomy. He was described by his contemporaries as ‘ever-smiling’ (mihita-pubbāngama). In Buddhist painting and sculpture the Buddha is always represented with a countenance happy, serene, contented and compassionate. Never a trace of suffering or agony or pain is to be seen. Buddhist art and architecture, Buddhist temples

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1S II (PTS), pp. 178-179; III pp. 149, 151.
2A V (PTS), p. 113.
3S V (PTS), p. 457. In fact the Buddha says that he who sees any one of the Four Noble Truths sees the other three as well. These Four Noble Truths are interconnected.
4There is a statue from Gandhara, and also one from Fou-Kien, China, depicting Gotama as an ascetic, emaciated, with all his ribs showing. But this was before his Enlightenment, when he was submitting himself to the rigorous ascetic practices which he condemned after he became Buddha.
never give the impression of gloom or sorrow, but produce an atmosphere of calm and serene joy.

Although there is suffering in life, a Buddhist should not be gloomy over it, should not be angry or impatient at it. One of the principal evils in life, according to Buddhism, is ‘repugnance’ or hatred. Repugnance (prātigha) is explained as ‘ill-will with regard to living beings, with regard to suffering and with regard to things pertaining to suffering. Its function is to produce a basis for unhappier states and bad conduct.‘

Thus it is wrong to be impatient at suffering. Being impatient or angry at suffering does not remove it. On the contrary, it adds a little more to one’s troubles, and aggravates and exacerbates a situation already disagreeable. What is necessary is not anger or impatience, but the understanding of the question of suffering, how it comes about, and how to get rid of it, and then to work accordingly with patience, intelligence, determination and energy.

There are two ancient Buddhist texts called the Theragāthā and Therigāthā which are full of the joyful utterances of the Buddha’s disciples, both male and female, who found peace and happiness in life through his teaching. The king of Kosala once told the Buddha that unlike many a disciple of other religious systems who looked haggard, coarse, pale, emaciated and unprepossessing, his disciples were ‘joyful and elated (bhātha-pabhaṭṭha), jubilant and exultant (vāgga-pagadda), enjoying the spiritual life (abhiratārīpa), with faculties pleased (piṭṭhitāmāra), free from anxiety (appassukka), serene (pamaloma), peaceful (paraddvutta) and living with a gazelle’s mind (mīgabhaṭṭena cetāsā), i.e., light-hearted.’ The king added that he believed that this healthy disposition was due to the fact that these venerable ones had certainly realized the great and full significance of the Blessed One’s teaching.

Buddhism is quite opposed to the melancholic, sorrowful, penitent and gloomy attitude of mind which is considered a hindrance to the realization of Truth. On the other hand, it is interesting to remember here that joy (piṭṭ) is one of the seven Bjājñamāgas or ‘Factors of Enlightenment’, the essential qualities to be cultivated for the realization of Nirvānā.

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1Abhisamuc, p. 7.
2M II (PTS), p. 121.
3For these Seven Factors of Enlightenment see Chapter on Meditation, p. 71.
places of the original Pali texts themselves the definition of *samma dāya* or the origin of *dukkha* includes other defilements and impurities (*kilesā*, *sātanā dhammā*), in addition to *tanha* ‘thirst’ which is always given the first place. Within the necessarily limited space of our discussion, it will be sufficient if we remember that this ‘thirst’ has as its centre the false idea of self arising out of ignorance.

Hier the term ‘thirst’ includes not only desire for, and attachment to, sense-pleasures, wealth and power, but also desire for, and attachment to, ideas and ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions and beliefs (*dhamma–tanha*). According to the Buddha’s analysis, all the troubles and strife in the world, from little personal quarrels in families to great wars between nations and countries, arise out of this selfish ‘thirst’. From this point of view, all economic, political and social problems are rooted in this selfish ‘thirst’. Great statesmen who try to settle international disputes and talk of ‘war and peace only in economic and political terms touch the superficialities, and never go deep into the real root of the problem. As the Buddha told Raṭhapāla: ‘The world lacks and hankers, and is enslaved to ‘thirst’ (*tanha*).’

Every one will admit that all the evils in the world are produced by selfish desire. This is not difficult to understand. But how this desire, ‘thirst’, can produce re-existence and re-becoming (*ponbhāriki) is a problem not so easy to grasp. It is here that we have to discuss the deeper philosophical side of the Second Noble Truth corresponding to the philosophical side of the First Noble Truth. Here we must have some idea about the theory of *karma* and rebirth.

There are four Nutriments (*ābāra*) in the sense of ‘cause’ or ‘condition’ necessary for the existence and continuity of beings:

1. ordinary material food (*kabaliṅkārābāra*),
2. contact of our sense-organs (including mind) with the external world (*phācābāra*),
3. consciousness (*viññānābāra*) and
4. mental volition or will (*manosāñcetanābāra*).

Of these four, the last mentioned ‘mental volition’ is the will to live, to exist, to re-exist, to continue, to become more and more. It creates the root of existence and continuity, striving forward by way of good and bad actions (*kusala–kusalakamma*). It is the same as ‘Volition’ (*cetanā*). We have seen earlier that volition is karma, as the Buddha himself has defined it. Referring to ‘Mental volition’ just mentioned above the Buddha says: ‘When one understands the nutriment of mental volition one understands the three forms of ‘thirst’ (*tanha*).’ Thus the terms ‘thirst’, ‘volition’, ‘mental volition’ and ‘karma’ all denote the same thing: they denote the desire, the will to be, to exist, to re-exist, to become more and more, to grow more and more, to accumulate more and more. This is the cause of the arising of *dukkha*, and this is found within the Aggregate of Mental Formations, one of the Five Aggregates which constitute a being.

Here is one of the most important and essential points in the Buddha’s teaching. We must therefore clearly and carefully mark and remember that the cause, the germ, of the arising of *dukkha* is within *dukkha* itself, and not outside; and we must equally well remember that the cause, the germ, of the cessation of *dukkha*, of the destruction of *dukkha*, is also within *dukkha* itself, and not outside. This is what is meant by the well-known formula often found in original Pali texts: *Yam kīhā samudayadhamman sabbam tān nirodhabhām ‘Whatever is of the nature of arising, all that is of the nature of cessation.’ A being, a thing, or a system, if it has within itself the nature of arising, the nature of coming into being, has also within itself the nature, the germ, of its own cessation and destruction. Thus *dukkha* (Five Aggregates) has within itself the nature of its own arising, and has also within

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1See Vībh. (PTS), p. 106 ff.
2M I (PTS), p. 51; S II p. 72; Vībh. p. 380.
3M I, p. 86.
4*ibid.*, p. 48.
5It is interesting to compare this ‘mental volition’ with ‘libido’ in modern psychology.
8See above p. 22.
9M II (PTS), p. 100. The three forms of ‘thirst’ are: (1) Thirst for sense-pleasures, (2) Thirst for existence and becoming, and (3) Thirst for non-existence, as given in the definition of *samma dāya* ‘arising of *dukkha*’ above.
10See above p. 22.
11M III (PTS), p. 280; S IV, pp. 47, 107; V, p. 423 and *passim*. 
As there is no permanent, unchanging substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next. So quite obviously, nothing permanent or unchanging can pass or transmigrate from one life to the next. It is a series that continues unbroken, but changes every moment. The series is, really speaking, nothing but movement. It is like a flame that burns through the night: it is not the same flame nor is it another. A child grows up to be a man of sixty. Certainly the man of sixty is not the same as the child of sixty years ago, nor is he another person. Similarly, a person who dies here and is reborn elsewhere is neither the same person, nor another (nà ca so na ca añña). It is the continuity of the same series. The difference between death and birth is only a thought-moment: the last thought-moment in this life conditions the first thought-moment in the so-called next life, which, in fact, is the continuity of the same series. During this life itself, too, one thought-moment conditions the next thought-moment. So from the Buddhist point of view, the question of life after death is not a great mystery, and a Buddhist is never worried about this problem.

As long as there is this ‘thirst’ to be and to become, the cycle of continuity (sàmòdha) goes on. It can stop only when its driving force, this ‘thirst’, is cut off through wisdom which sees Reality, Truth, Nirvāṇa.

CHAPTER IV

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH:

NIRODHA: ‘The Cessation of Dukkha’

The Third Noble Truth is that there is emancipation, liberation, freedom from suffering, from the continuity of dukkha. This is called the Noble Truth of the Cessation of dukkha (Dukkhanirodhaariyāsañca), which is Nibbāna, more popularly known in its Sanskrit form of Nirvāṇa.

To eliminate dukkha completely one has to eliminate the main root of dukkha, which is ‘thirst’ (tanha), as we saw earlier. Therefore Nirvāṇa is known also by the term Tanhakkhaya ‘Extinction of Thirst’.

Now you will ask: But what is Nirvāṇa? Volumes have been written in reply to this quite natural and simple question; they have, more and more, only confused the issue rather than clarified it. The only reasonable reply to give to the question is that it can never be answered completely and satisfactorily in words, because human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality which is Nirvāṇa.

Language is created and used by masses of human beings to express things and ideas experienced by their sense organs and their mind. A supramundane experience like that of the Absolute Truth is not of such a category. Therefore there cannot be words to express that experience, just as the fish had no words in his vocabulary to express the nature of the solid land. The tortoise told his friend the fish that he (the tortoise) just returned to the lake after a walk on the land. ‘Of course’ the fish said, ‘You mean swimming.’ The tortoise tried to explain that one couldn’t swim on the land, that it was solid, and that one walked on it. But the fish insisted that there could be nothing like it, that it must be liquid like his lake, with waves, and that one must be able to dive and swim there.
Truth. Truth is never negative, though there is a popular expression as negative truth. The realization of this Truth, i.e., to see things as they are (yatadabhiṣayam) without illusion or ignorance (avijjā),¹ is the extinction of craving 'thirst' (Tanhañcchaya), and the cessation (Nirodha) of dukkha, which is Nirvana. It is interesting and useful to remember here the Mahayana view of Nirvana as not being different from Samādhi.² The same thing is Samsāra or Nirvana according to the way you look at it—subjectively or objectively. This Mahayana view was probably developed out of the ideas found in the original Theravāda Pali texts, to which we have just referred in our brief discussion.

It is incorrect to think that Nirvana is the natural result of the extinction of craving. Nirvana is not the result of anything. If it would be a result, then it would be an effect produced by a cause. It would be samkhata ‘produced’ and ‘conditioned’. Nirvana is neither cause nor effect. It is beyond cause and effect. Truth is not a result nor an effect. It is not produced like a mystic, spiritual, mental state, such as dhyāna or samādhi. TRUTH IS. NIRVANA IS.

The only thing you can do is to see it, to realize it. There is a path leading to the realization of Nirvana. But Nirvana is not the result of this path.³ You may get to the mountain along a path, but the mountain is not the result, not an effect of the path. You may see a light, but the light is not the result of your eyesight.

People often ask: What is there after Nirvana? This question cannot arise, because Nirvana is the Ultimate Truth. If it is Ultimate, there can be nothing after it. If there is anything after Nirvana, then that will be the Ultimate Truth and not Nirvana. A monk named Rādha put this question to the Buddha in a different form: ‘For what purpose (or end) is Nirvana?’ This question presupposes something after Nirvana, when it postulates some purpose or end for it. So the Buddha answered: ‘O Rādha, this question could not catch its limit (i.e., it is beside the

¹Cf. Lanka, p. 200; ‘O Mahāmati, Nirvāṇa means to see the state of things as they are.’
²Nigāraṇa clearly says that ‘Samsāra has no difference whatever from Nirvāṇa and Nirvāṇa has no difference whatever from Samsāra.’ (Madhy, Kari XXY, 19).
³It is useful to remember here that among nine supra-mundane dharma (nasade-kutiara-dhama) Nirvāṇa is beyond magga (path) and phala (fruition).

point). One lives the holy life with Nirvāṇa as its final plunge (into the Absolute Truth), as its goal, as its ultimate end.⁴

Some popular inaccurately phrased expressions like ‘The Buddha entered into Nirvāṇa or Parinirvāṇa after his death’ have given rise to many imaginary speculations about Nirvāṇa.² The moment you hear the phrase that ‘the Buddha entered into Nirvāṇa or Parinirvāṇa’, you take Nirvāṇa to be a state, or a realm, or a position in which there is some sort of existence, and try to imagine it in terms of the senses of the word ‘existence’ as it is known to you. This popular expression ‘entered into Nirvāṇa’ has no equivalent in the original texts. There is no such thing as ‘entering into Nirvāṇa after death’. There is a word parinibbuto used to denote the death of the Buddha or an Arhat who has realized Nirvāṇa, but it does not mean ‘entering into Nirvāṇa’. Parinibbuto simply means ‘fully passed away’, ‘fully blown out’ or ‘fully extinct’, because the Buddha or an Arhat has no re-existence after his death.

Now another question arises: What happens to the Buddha or an Arhat after his death, parinirvāṇa? This comes under the category of unanswered questions (avayakata).³ Even when the Buddha spoke about this, he indicated that no words in our vocabulary could express what happens to an Arhat after his death. In reply to a Parivāraka named Vaccha, the Buddha said that terms like ‘born’ or ‘not born’ do not apply in the case of an Arhat, because those things—matter, sensation, perception, mental activities, consciousness—with which the terms like ‘born’ and ‘not born’ are associated, are completely destroyed and un-rooted, never to rise again after his death.⁴

An Arhat after his death is often compared to a fire gone out when the supply of wood is over, or to the flame of a lamp gone out when the wick and oil are finished.⁵ Here it should

⁴S III (PTS), p. 189.
⁵There are some who write ‘after the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha’ instead of ‘after the Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha’. ‘After the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha’ has no meaning, and the expression is unknown in Buddhist literature. It is always ‘after the Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha’.
⁶S IV (PTS), p. 375 f.
⁷M I (PTS), p. 486.
⁸Ibid. I, p. 487; III, p. 245; Sn (PTS), v. 232 (p. 41).
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be clearly and distinctly understood, without any confusion, that what is compared to a flame or a fire gone out is not Nirvana, but the ‘being’ composed of the Five Aggregates who realized Nirvana. This point has to be emphasized because many people, even some great scholars, have misunderstood and misinterpreted this simile as referring to Nirvana. Nirvana is never compared to a fire or a lamp gone out.

There is another popular question: If there is no Self, no Atma, who realizes Nirvana? Before we go on to Nirvana, let us ask the question: Who thinks now, if there is no Self? We have seen earlier that it is the thought that thinks, that there is no thinker behind the thought. In the same way, it is wisdom (paññā), realization, that realizes. There is no other self behind the realization. In the discussion of the origin of dukkha we saw that whatever it may be—whether being, or thing, or system—if it is of the nature of arising, it has within itself the nature, the germ, of its cessation, its destruction. Now dukkha, saṁsāra, the cycle of continuity, is of the nature of arising; it must also be of the nature of cessation. Dukkha arises because of ‘thirst’ (tanha), and it ceases because of wisdom (paññā). ‘Thirst’ and wisdom are both within the Five Aggregates, as we saw earlier.¹

Thus, the germ of their arising as well as that of their cessation are both within the Five Aggregates. This is the real meaning of the Buddha’s well-known statement: ‘Within this fathom-long sentient body itself, I postulate the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world.’² This means that all the Four Noble Truths are found within the Five Aggregates, i.e., within ourselves. (Here the word ‘world’ (loka) is used in place of dukkha). This also means that there is no external power that produces the arising and the cessation of dukkha.

When wisdom is developed and cultivated according to the Fourth Noble Truth (the next to be taken up), it sees the secret of life, the reality of things as they are. When the secret is discovered, when the Truth is seen, all the forces which feverishly produce the continuity of saṁsāra in illusion become calm and incapable of

producing any more karma-formations, because there is no more illusion, no more ‘thirst’ for continuity. It is like a mental disease which is cured when the cause or the secret of the malady is discovered and seen by the patient.

In almost all religions the summum bonum can be attained only after death. But Nirvana can be realized in this very life; it is not necessary to wait till you die to ‘attain’ it.

He who has realized the Truth, Nirvana, is the happiest being in the world. He is free from all ‘complexes’ and obsessions, the worries and troubles that torment others. His mental health is perfect. He does not repent the past, nor does he brood over the future. He lives fully in the present.¹ Therefore he appreciates and enjoys things in the purest sense without self-projections. He is joyful, exultant, enjoying the pure life, his faculties pleased, free from anxiety, serene and peaceful.₂ As he is free from selfish desire, hatred, ignorance, conceit, pride, and all such ‘defilements’, he is pure and gentle, full of universal love, compassion, kindness, sympathy, understanding and tolerance. His service to others is of the purest, for he has no thought of self. He gains nothing, accumulates nothing, not even anything spiritual, because he is free from the illusion of Self, and the ‘thirst’ for becoming.

Nirvana is beyond all terms of duality and relativity. It is therefore beyond our conceptions of good and evil, right and wrong, existence and non-existence. Even the word ‘happiness’ (sukha) which is used to describe Nirvana has an entirely different sense here. Sāriputta once said: ‘O friend, Nirvana is happiness! Nirvana is happiness!’ Then Udāvi asked: ‘But, friend Sāriputta, what happiness can it be if there is no sensation?’ Sāriputta’s reply was highly philosophical and beyond ordinary comprehension: ‘That there is no sensation itself is happiness’.

Nirvana is beyond logic and reasoning (atakkāvacara). However much we may engage, often as a vain intellectual pastime, in highly speculative discussions regarding Nirvana or Ultimate Truth or Reality, we shall never understand it that way. A child in the kindergarten should not quarrel about the theory of relativity. Instead, if he follows his studies patiently and diligently,

¹See Agg 22, 31.
²See 42, 43.
³Colombo, 1929, p. 218.
by the term 'Government'. 'The Ten Duties of the King', therefore, apply today to all those who constitute the government, such as the head of the state, ministers, political leaders, legislative and administrative officers, etc.

The first of the 'Ten Duties of the King' is liberality, generosity, charity (dana). The ruler should not have craving and attachment to wealth and property, but should give it away for the welfare of the people.

Second: A high moral character (sila). He should never destroy life, cheat, steal and exploit others, commit adultery, utter falsehood, and take intoxicating drinks. That is, he must at least observe the Five Precepts of the layman.

Third: Sacrificing everything for the good of the people (parisaga), he must be prepared to give up all personal comfort, name and fame, and even his life, in the interest of the people.

Fourth: Honesty and integrity (ajjana). He must be free from fear or favour in the discharge of his duties, must be sincere in his intentions, and must not deceive the public.

Fifth: Kindness and gentleness (maddava). He must possess a genial temperament.

Sixth: Austerity in habits (tapas). He must lead a simple life, and should not indulge in a life of luxury. He must have self-control.

Seventh: Freedom from hatred, ill-will, enmity (akkodha). He should bear no grudge against anybody.

Eighth: Non-violence (avibhima), which means not only that he should harm nobody, but also that he should try to promote peace by avoiding and preventing war, and everything which involves violence and destruction of life.

Ninth: Patience, forbearance, tolerance, understanding (khanthi). He must be able to bear hardships, difficulties and insults without losing his temper.

Tenth: Non-opposition, non-obstruction (avirodha), that is to say that he should not oppose the will of the people, should not obstruct any measures that are conducive to the welfare of the people. In other words he should rule in harmony with his people.1

1 It is interesting to note here that the Five Principles or Pancho-sila in India's foreign policy are in accordance with the Buddhist principles which Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor of India, applied to the administration of his government in the 3rd century B.C. The expression Pancho-sila (Five Precepts or Virtues), is itself a Buddhist term.
If a country is ruled by men endowed with such qualities, it is needless to say that that country must be happy. But this was not a Utopia, for there were kings in the past like Asoka of India who had established kingdoms based on these ideas.

The world today lives in constant fear, suspicion, and tension. Science has produced weapons which are capable of unimaginable destruction. Brandishing these new instruments of death, great powers threaten and challenge one another, boasting shamelessly that one could cause more destruction and misery in the world than the other.

They have gone along this path of madness to such a point that, now, if they take one more step forward in that direction, the result will be nothing but mutual annihilation along with the total destruction of humanity.

Human beings in fear of the situation they have themselves created, want to find a way out, and seek some kind of solution. But there is none except that held out by the Buddha—his message of non-violence and peace, of love and compassion, of tolerance and understanding, of truth and wisdom, of respect and regard for all life, of freedom from selfishness, hatred and violence.

The Buddha says: ‘Never by hatred is hatred appeased, but it is appeased by kindness. This is an eternal truth.’

‘One should win anger through kindness, wickedness through goodness, selfishness through charity, and falsehood through truthfulness.’

There can be no peace or happiness for man as long as he desires and thirsts after conquering and subjugating his neighbour. As the Buddha says: ‘The victor breeds hatred, and the defeated lies down in misery. He who renounces both victory and defeat is happy and peaceful.’ The only conquest that brings peace and happiness is self-conquest. ‘One may conquer millions in battle, but he who conquers himself, only one, is the greatest of conquerors.’

You will say this is all very beautiful, noble and sublime, but impractical. Is it practical to hate one another? To kill one another? To live in eternal fear and suspicion like wild animals in a jungle? Is this more practical and comfortable? Was hatred ever appeased by hatred? Was evil ever won over by evil? But there are examples, at least in individual cases, where hatred is appeased by love and kindness, and evil won over by goodness. You will say that this may be true, practicable in individual cases, but that it never works in national and international affairs. People are hypnotized, psychologically puzzled, blinded and deceived by the political and propaganda usage of such terms as ‘national’, ‘international’, or ‘state’. What is a nation but a vast conglomeration of individuals? A nation or a state does not act, it is the individual who acts. What the individual thinks and does is what the nation or the state thinks and does. What is applicable to the individual is applicable to the nation or the state. If hatred can be appeased by love and kindness on the individual scale, surely it can be realized on the national and international scale too. Even in the case of a single person, to meet hatred with kindness one must have tremendous courage, boldness, faith and confidence in moral force. May it not be more so with regard to international affairs? If by the expression ‘not practical’ you mean ‘not easy’, you are right. Definitely it is not easy. Yet it should be tried. You may say it is risky trying it. Surely it cannot be more risky than trying a nuclear war.

It is a consolation and inspiration to think today that at least there was one great ruler, well known in history, who had the courage, the confidence and the vision to apply this teaching of non-violence, peace and love to the administration of a vast empire, in both internal and external affairs—Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor of India (3rd century B.C.)—‘the Beloved of the gods’ as he was called.

At first he followed the example of his father (Bindusāra) and grandfather (Chandragupta), and wished to complete the conquest of the Indian peninsula. He invaded and conquered Kalinga, and annexed it. Many hundreds of thousands were killed, wounded, tortured and taken prisoner in this war. But later, when he became a Buddhist, he was completely changed and transformed by the Buddha’s teachings. In one of his famous Edicts, inscribed on rock, (Rock Edict XIII, as it is now called), the original of which one may read even today, referring to the conquest of Kalinga, the
Emperor publicly expressed his 'repentance', and said how 'extremely painful' it was for him to think of that carnage. He publicly declared that he would never draw his sword again for any conquest, but that he 'wishes all living beings non-violence, self control, the practice of serenity and mildness. This, of course, is considered the chief conquest by the Beloved of the gods (i.e., Asoka), namely the conquest by piety (dhamma-vijaya). Not only did he renounce war himself, he expressed his desire that 'my sons and grandsons will not think of a new conquest as worth achieving... let them think of that conquest only which is the conquest by piety. That is good for this world and the world beyond.'

This is the only example in the history of mankind of a victorious conquerer at the zenith of his power, still possessing the strength to continue his territorial conquests, yet renouncing war and violence and turning to peace and non-violence.

Here is a lesson for the world today. The ruler of an empire publicly turned his back on war and violence and embraced the message of peace and non-violence. There is no historical evidence to show that any neighbouring king took advantage of Asoka's piety to attack him militarily, or that there was any revolt or rebellion within his empire during his lifetime. On the contrary there was peace throughout the land, and even countries outside his empire seem to have accepted his benign leadership.

To talk of maintaining peace through the balance of power, or through the threat of nuclear deterrents, is foolish. The might of armaments can only produce fear, and not peace. It is impossible that there can be genuine and lasting peace through fear. Through fear can come only hatred, ill-will and hostility, suppressed perhaps for the time being only, but ready to erupt and become violent at any moment. True and genuine peace can prevail only in an atmosphere of mettā, amity, free from fear, suspicion and danger.

Buddhism aims at creating a society where the ruinous struggle for power is renounced; where calm and peace prevail away from conquest and defeat; where the persecution of the innocent is vehemently denounced; where one who conquers oneself is more respected than those who conquer millions by military and economic warfare; where hatred is conquered by kindness, and evil by goodness; where enmity, jealousy, ill-will and greed do not infect men's minds; where compassion is the driving force of action; where all, including the least of living things, are treated with fairness, consideration and love; where life in peace and harmony, in a world of material contentment, is directed towards the highest and noblest aim, the realization of the Ultimate Truth, Nirvāṇa.