

WHY RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE ?

BUDDHIST TOLERANCE

This is a very important subject for us who live in any multi-racial and multi-religious country. As Buddhists, we must know how to regard other religions, how to accommodate them and what place we are going to give them in our religion.

First we must understand the various ways which the different co-religionists regard each other: we must understand how the various religious groups react to each other: some religious groups are indifferent to the teachings and the practices of other religions. Some maintain their religious affiliation and yet respect other religions and appreciate their teachings. There are those who do not have a religion and look down upon every religion, while there are still others who do not bother about any religion and completely ignore all religion: their excuse is that they have no time to think about religion or to practice religion since they are always engaged with their business and family affairs.

Buddhists belong to the religious group that accepts and appreciates the reasonable teachings of every religion. Buddhists can also tolerate the practices of other religions, cultural traditions and customs, although they may not necessarily wish to emulate them. In other words, Buddhists respect the other man's views and appreciate other practices without harbouring any religious prejudices. This is called religious tolerance. And if there are certain Buddhists who feel they are unable to appreciate the ways of other religious practices, then the least they could do is to maintain their silence and refrain from any undue criticism: this attitude is very important for peaceful co-existence. This is called sympathetic understanding.

If we study certain incidents, practices, traditions and teachings of Buddhism, then we can understand the basis of our religion and our attitude towards the other religions. Others may say that Buddhists are very passive because of this policy of tolerance, but still, we maintain that this attitude is correct and can be appreciated by every thinking man. To practise a religion we must be honest, sincere, truthful and kind to others: we must avoid deceit and cruelty: and in our relation with others we must be broad-minded.

According to the Buddha, if we adopt aggressive and violent methods to solve our problems, we cannot find the real solution to overcome them. No doubt, we can suppress some troubles and temporarily win the battle as long as our enemies remain weak. But when our enemies get the chance, they will not keep quiet and will not forgive us. Therefore, if we act with violence, we can never find lasting peace. This is why the Buddha once said: "Hatred is never ended by hatred, but only by loving-kindness." Buddha also said: "It is not that I quarrel with the world but the world quarrels with me. A teacher of truth never quarrels with others.

In Buddhism there is no such thing as righteous indignation or righteous anger: Buddhism never tried to justify war under any circumstances. There were no nervous irritability or emotion or anger in the Buddha's mind just because some people did not pay attention to him.

The only harsh word that the Buddha ever used was “foolish man”, to point that certain beliefs were wrong.

We have ample evidence to prove that, for the last 2500 years, in the propagation of Buddhism, Buddhists have never ill-treated or used violence against the followers of other religions. The sources of evidence include the original teachings of the Buddha, the actual Buddhist practices and traditions and world history. We have introduced this religion all over the world as a goodwill message. We have introduced this religion without forcing people to embrace it; and we have not shed even a drop of blood – either human or animal – in the name of Buddhism. This is a record in world history – a record which is appreciated by every cultured man anywhere in the world, irrespective of his religious denomination or belief.

The attitude of a real religion must be to advise the people instead of ruling or intimidation.

DIFFERENT OPINIONS ON RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

According to the Buddha, human beings are not cruel or wicked by nature, but they make many mistakes and act as cruel people because of their ignorance. Therefore, as wise people, it is our duty to show them the correct path instead of condemning them into eternal suffering or religious damnation.

Buddhist tolerance shown to other religions is reasonable. Buddhists do tolerate other religious practices, and yet at the same time they can express their views freely regarding those practices and beliefs without harbouring hatred or prejudices.

Pointing out the futility of certain religious beliefs and practices is one thing and religious intolerance is another thing. Some have taken the liberty of incorporating all sorts of superstitious beliefs in the name of Buddhism. Others take undue advantage of that tolerance of Buddhists to convert them into their faith.

According to the Buddha, real religious tolerance is not mere tolerance of other religious beliefs but the tolerance that we have to bear when others try to irritate us by condemning our religion. The Buddha advised his followers: "If you become angry when others condemn your religion you are no followers of Mine." Perfect religious tolerance is practiced, but it does not mean that false doctrines are to be encouraged. Therefore, Buddhism is not a yes man's religion.

Some religionists had a belief that religious tolerance can only be regarded as an unhealthy symptom, a sign of approaching dissolution. To them, religious tolerance could never be seen as a virtue, but only as a reprehensible weakness of faith or a disregard for the welfare of others. It was on this ground they tried their level best and in every possible way to convert others into their faith and condemned all those who did not agree to accept their faith.

In the Buddhist scriptures so much boundless love and kindness is mentioned and so much tolerance is preached: it is clear that in the scriptures there is no sanction for Buddhists to engage in any conflict with other religionists. Furthermore, no missionary or monk would ever think of preaching ill-will and hatred against so-called 'unbelievers'.

At the same time, there are certain religious practices and customs that Buddhists have incorporated from other religions and have refined them in the course of its historical expansion.

THE BUDDHA AND OTHER RELIGIOUS TEACHERS

One day a well-known person approached the Buddha and told him that he would like to be one of his followers. The Buddha asked him the reason for changing his religion. The man replied, I heard that so many people are praising and appreciating the Buddha's teachings and his religious way of life. So I also decided to follow the Buddha."

Then the Buddha asked him, "Have you ever heard my teachings? Do you know whether there is truth in my teachings? Do you know whether you can practice my way of life."

The man replied, "Ven. Sir, this advice that you just gave me, is more than enough for me to understand the nature of your teaching."

Soon he became a follower of the Buddha. Again he asked, "Is it permissible for me to continue giving alms to the priests of my former faith?"

The Buddha replied that there was no reason whatsoever for him to stop giving alms to any priests. The Buddha explained on many occasions that anyone could give alms to anybody in this world. Giving alms is a meritorious deed.

This story is a good example for us to understand the sort of method the Buddha adopted to introduce his religion and to understand how the Buddha treated the followers of other religions.

Yet when one religious group approaches another religious group to ask for donations towards their religious, social and cultural activities, the reply is usually "Sorry, we cannot help you; it is against our religion. We are forbidden to give donations to other religions." Buddhists do not support this kind of attitude.

After receiving certain religious indoctrinations, some people become very allergic to other religions. Their allergy takes various forms: it makes them afraid to step into a place of worship that belongs to other religions; it makes them deaf when they hear the teachings of other religions; it makes other religious books 'untouchable' for them.

Here is a most important point: the Buddha has advised his followers to accept and to respect the truth wherever they find it. This means that we need not ignore the reasonable teachings of other religions. This clearly shows that the Buddha never had any jealous attitude to other religions, nor did he try to monopolise religious truth. He wanted to point out only one thing: the Truth. His whole teaching is based on the Four Noble Truths.

The Buddha stressed that no one religious teacher can reveal all the important manifestations of the truth for mankind. Most of the world's religious teachers have revealed certain aspects of the truth according to the circumstances that prevailed at that time. The Buddha also explained that during his life time, he pointed out only the most important aspects of religion and of the truth; he designed his teachings to help man to get rid of his sufferings or unsatisfactoriness. This is why his teaching is known more as a righteous way of life rather than a religion or a philosophy.

But we are the people who organized his teachings as a religion by incorporating various religious rites, rituals, traditions and customs. Of course, these practices are important to introduce and to preserve religion amongst the masses. But for a man seeking to be good or to be religious, such ritualistic practices are not really important.

As Buddhists we can respect and honour the founders and teachers of other religions. All religious teachers have dedicated their lives for the sake of human welfare. They deserve respect and honour, for they also have done good service to mankind. If we like, we also can keep pictures or symbols of these religious teachers in our homes; our religion never objects to that. Our religion advises us to honour those who are worthy of honour. But very unfortunately others do not wish to adopt this policy and sometimes they even condemn an enlightened, most compassionate and liberal-minded religious teacher like the Buddha as a "devil". This kind of unfriendly and uncultured attitude to other religions cannot be found among the followers of the Buddha. The Buddha once said: "As an elephant on the battle-field endures the arrows shot from a bow, even so, Ananda, shall I endure abusive speech; most people are, indeed, ill natured."

Buddhists can respect every religious teacher and also can accept their reasonable teachings. Then the question arises: how are we going to accommodate these teachers in our religion? What place are we going to give them? Are we going to give them the same place that we have given to the Buddha? It is up to the public to have an unbiased judgement and decision by studying and comparing the teachings of all those religious teachers and their attitudes towards certain problems regarding our life, our salvation and the world. After making such comparisons, then we can decide whether all the religious teachers are equal or otherwise. Certainly there are different opinions and interpretations as well as similarities in all the religious teachers and their teachings.

When we compare the Buddha to the other religious teachers, we should not forget that the Buddha had not committed himself on certain issues such as the origin of this world and the origin of life. Many great thinkers, philosophers and scientists appreciate this attitude of the Buddha.

There are three opinions regarding the origin of this world. Materialistic and scientific concept is that this world came into existence due to combination of certain elements according to the nature of this universe and this will go on changing according to the same natural law. This is the first opinion.

The second opinion is that it is impossible to find out either the beginning or the end of this world. It is incomprehensible to our human mind which is covered by the dark cloud of ignorance, and we should not bother about it.

The third opinion is that this world was created by a powerful god and without god it is impossible for this world to come into existence in this manner.

Again, amongst those who believe that the world was created by the god, there are two opinions. One group says god has provided the necessary elements to create the world and after that left the whole responsibility in the hand of nature without any interference from him.

The other belief is that god created the world according to his own wish and he is responsible for everything in this world and it moves according to his wish. Man's duty is to obey him, pray to him and live according to the laws imposed by him.

H.G. Wells a well known historian, in his *Short World History*, says, "You see clearly a man, simple, devout, lonely, battling for light – a vivid human personality, not a myth. Beneath a mass of miraculous fable I feel that there also was a man. He too, gave a message to mankind universal in its character. Many of our best modern ideas are in closest harmony with it. All the miseries and discontents of life are due, he taught, to selfishness. Selfishness takes three forms – one, the desire to satisfy the senses; second is craving for immortality; and the third is the desire for prosperity and worldliness.

Before a man can become serene he must cease to live for his senses or himself. Then he merges into a greater being.

Buddha, in different languages called men to self-forgetfulness five hundred years before Christ. In some ways he was nearer to us and our needs.

Buddha was more lucid upon our individual importance in service than Christ and less ambiguous upon the question of personal immortality.

Buddhism is strong enough to face any challenge pertaining to religion in a peaceful manner, and answerable to any critical modern scientific questions which shake many religious faiths.

THE BASIC TEACHING OF THE BUDDHA REFLECTS HIS ENLIGHTENED NATURE

The real nature of the Buddha's enlightenment is reflected in the three characteristics: anicca, dukkha, and anatta. Anicca is the impermanency of everything in this universe. Dukkha is the unsatisfactoriness of everything pertaining to our life. Anatta is the impersonality of the life.

The three basic principles of the Buddha's teachings are: sila, samadhi, panna. Sila is the development of morality. Samadhi is concentration or introspection of the mind in order to understand the nature of the mind and how to control it and how to develop it and how to make use of it. Panna is wisdom or enlightenment: the realization of the real nature of the life and the universe. The whole teaching of the Buddha is based on these three pillars.

The Buddha attained his enlightenment only after developing and using superhuman effort. He attained his enlightenment not by praying, sacrificing or making offerings to any god, not by performing various rites and rituals, not by reciting any mantram, and not by any aid from external powers. He attained enlightenment only after he could manage to develop himself through self-discipline, self-restraint, self-sacrifice abstaining from all kinds of evils and practicing morality, keeping away from worldly pleasures, sacrificing his own comfort for the sake of others, spiritual development, by purifying his heart and mind and by realizing the real nature of life and the world. Thus very few can understand the real nature of the Buddha, and the teaching introduced by him.

Buddhism is saturated with the spirit of free inquiry and tolerance. It is the teaching of the open mind and the sympathetic heart which lights and warms the whole universe with its rays of wisdom and compassion.

Some special characteristics of Buddhism are its rationality, efficacy, non-aggressiveness, harmlessness and universality.

Another special feature in his teaching is the law of cause and effect or the natural law that describes the existing universal cosmic order. This law of cause and effect and the doctrine of karma, explain the secret of the inequality or differences amongst mankind.

Twelve links of the cycle of birth and death (dependence upon origination) were also realized by the Buddha through his enlightenment.

To understand the real nature of the Buddha's enlightenment, we must also consider his perfection or his supreme enlightenment; we must consider the methods that he adopted to train wicked, cruel and dangerous persons with his great compassion; we must consider the liberal way of his teachings without commanding anyone to follow him or to believe in him; we must consider the freedom and due credit that the Buddha gave to man's intelligence and his method of keeping quiet without making some statements regarding certain worldly and metaphysical issues which have no morals or religious value for spiritual development or which are beyond the understanding capacity of the ordinary man; we must consider the Buddha's way of showing peace which is not the peace of the grave but of the living; the peace that we hope for by practicing a religion, must be experienced whilst we are here in this world. The Buddha taught a 'let us live happily and let others also live happily', religion; he presented a 'do-it-yourself' religion.

Before the Buddha's coming, the gate to heaven or eternal salvation was open only to followers of one particular religion and the passport to heaven was available from priests of one particular caste. But the Buddha pointed out that the gate is open to the followers of any religion who lead a righteous way of life. According to the Buddha, good conduct is the only passport to heaven.

Mr. Nehru says: "Buddhism influenced Indian life in a hundred ways, as it was bound to, for it must be remembered that it was a living, dynamic, and wide-spread religion in India for over a thousand years. Even in the long years of its decline in India, and when later it practically ceased to count as a separate religion here, much of it remained as a part of the Hindu faith and in national ways of life and thought. Even though the religion as such was ultimately rejected by the people, the ineffaceable imprint of it remained and powerfully influenced the development of the race. The permanent effect had little

to do with dogma or philosophic theory or religious belief. It was the ethical and social and practical idealism of Buddha and his religion that influenced our people and left their imperishable marks upon them.”

According to Dr. L.M. Joshi: “In spite of the ravages of time and destruction by Indian and foreign fanatics, Buddhism is still speaking vividly and majestically, through its thousands of inscriptions, about one thousand rock-cut sanctuaries and monasteries, thousands of ruined stupas and monastic establishments and an incalculable number of images, sculptures, paintings and emblems, that prevailed universally among the classes and masses of India for over fifteen centuries after the age of the Buddha.”

THE VALIDITY OF RELIGION

We must not judge or measure the validity of a religion or condemn a religion simply by observing what people practise in the name of the religion. An uneducated man might be practicing certain meaningless traditions while thinking that he is following a real religious practice. To understand the real nature of a religion, we have to study the original teachings of the founder of that religion.

Simply by preaching and praising one particular religion and by condemning another religion can we prove that the followers of that particular religion are more sincere, more honest, more kind and more religious than the others?

Perhaps you might have heard certain religionists who have been preaching their religion as the only way to final salvation and that the other religions are wrong. Today some of them have changed their way of preaching: they are slowly learning to recognize the good in other religions and to respect them.

This kind of religious tolerance has been adopted very recently by some religionists. However, in Buddhism, this tradition of religious tolerance had been introduced from the very beginning.

We always say that the teachings of our religion are better, but we must find out whether we really practise those teachings, which we talk about.

According to our respective religions, we have different beliefs regarding our life and the here-after. But we have not realized that we are all common in every aspect of our life. We are common in our birth, in our sickness, in our worries and miseries, in our calamities and misunderstandings, in our jealousy, hatred and greed; we are common in our old age, in our unsatisfactoriness of life and finally, we are common in death.

When we boast about our religion, can we prove that the followers of any particular religion are free from all those unfortunate human problems? It is true that we have all sorts of promises after our death. But we must prove the reality of our particular religion through living examples like experiencing good results while we are alive. We have to show that the followers of our religion are more fortunate and more cultured than the others through our way of life. Those who profess religions and tell others that their religions are far superior must substantiate by setting good examples to the other

religionists or to those who have no religion through their great humane qualities and wisdom.

It is advisable to give up the superiority complex which some religionists have in their mind. Naturally, there are good and bad people amongst the followers of every religion. At the same time, there are some good people amongst those who have no religion at all. Can we prove the validity of a religion only by talking about it without following real religious principles?

The way that we treat the followers of other religions is more than enough to understand the nature of our religion and to understand whether we practise our religion or not. If we really practise our religions then religious, national or political intolerance and hatred are incomprehensible.

People who fight and shed blood in the name of religion, do not serve their religion. They fight for their own personal gain or power. Those who truly practise a religion have no grounds to fight. A real religion never encourages any form of violence.

Either ordinary dust or gold dust, or both can cause trouble in the eyes. In the same way whether people declare war in the name of religion or for any other reason both bring about miseries amongst the people.

If Buddhists practise real “loving-kindness” as taught by the Buddha, if Muslims follow real “brotherhood” as taught in their religion, if Christians practise the teaching of “love thy neighbour” and if Hindus practise “oneness” of mankind, there would be no reason to have all sorts of clashes, calamities, disturbances, and wars in this world.

We should not take religion as a subject just to talk about or argue with others, or as a means to organize certain religious functions and ceremonies, to celebrate occasions and to glorify ourselves. Instead, we must try to overcome our human weakness and bad habits. To do this, we must follow the fundamental principles of our respective religion.

Another way to determine the validity of religion is by reasoning and experience. Swami Vivekananda says in his public lectures: “Experience is the only source of knowledge. The same methods of investigation which we apply to the sciences and to exterior knowledge should be applied to religion. If a religion is destroyed by such investigation and found it was nothing but a useless and unworthy superstition; the sooner it disappeared the better. Why religions should claim that they are not bound to abide by the standpoint of reason no one knows.... For it is better that mankind should become atheist by following reason than blindly believe in two hundred million gods on the authority of anybody..... Perhaps there are prophets, who have passed the limits of sense and obtained a glimpse of the beyond. We shall believe it only when we can do the same ourselves; not before. It is said that reason is not strong enough, that often it makes mistakes. If reason is weak why should a body of priests be considered any better guides? “I will abide by my reason,” continues Vivekananda, “because with all its weakness there is some chance of my getting at truth through it... We should therefore follow reasons, and also sympathise with those who do not come to any sort of belief, following reason.”

The validity of a religion is not necessarily established by occultism and mysticism. Swami Vivekananda also says: "Occultism and mysticism – these creepy things there may be great truths in them, but they have nearly destroyed us...and here is the test of truth – anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison, there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all-knowledge... These mysticisms, in spite of some grains of truth in them, are generally weakening. And beware of superstition. I would rather see everyone of you rank atheists than superstitious fools, for the atheist is alive, and you can make something of him. But if superstition enters, the brain is gone, the brain is softening, degradation has seized upon the life... Mystery-mongering and superstition are always signs of weakness."

When we accept a belief blindly, we create imaginations and projections to defend that belief; we hold such a belief firmly in our mind and try to justify that our views are correct although others come and give ample reasons that we are holding wrong views. We must not accept a religion on blind faith in its beliefs and scriptures.

We cannot show the progress of a religion simply by erecting big buildings as places of worship or by making huge images or through various functions and ceremonies or organizing some colourful and attractive religious activities to bring more and more people into religion but we can show progress if we behave as harmless people, lead a decent life and convince others through our kindness, sincerity and understanding.

RATIONAL METHOD TO INTRODUCE A RELIGION

It is difficult to introduce a religion without making use of these three main issues: holy scriptures, God-idea and the next world. Yet according to Mr. Nehru, we must try to avoid these very issues.

He says that if we introduce a religion on any one of these three grounds, then the people would tend to rely on them and so would accept that religion without using their reasoning power. Therefore, it is advisable to allow people to seek the truth through their experience and with a free mind. This is an ideal method to introduce a religion. If we follow this method, we can avoid religious, prejudices, blind faith and misunderstanding.

Nehru also has mentioned that one should not be ready to accept everything written in any holy book in the name of religion. But one thing he can agree, that is: good begets good and bad begets bad; this is the main principle of his religion.

According to the Buddha, when we accept a religion, we have to do so without blind faith. At the same time, when we reject a religion we should not hate the religion that we have rejected.

The Buddha did not encourage his followers to have mere faith in anything without proper understanding. One day a group of people called Kalamas told him they had been considerably troubled by many 'holy men' all of whom taught a different way, all of whom said that their way was the only way, all of whom said that any other way was wrong. The chief of the Kalamas asked Buddha how he could know which was right

and which was wrong. The Buddha advised Kalama, "Do not believe in traditions merely because they have been handed down for many generations and in many places; do not believe in anything because it is rumoured and spoken of by many; do not believe because the written statement of some old sage is produced; do not believe in what you have fancied, thinking that because it is extraordinary it must have been implanted by a supernatural being. After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it."

When the Buddha introduced his teachings, he had no concern to establish a religious monopoly; Here is a story to illustrate this point. Once the Buddha's chief disciple, Sariputta, said that Gautama Buddha was the best amongst all those Buddhas who had appeared and who would appear in the future. The Buddha pointed out to Sariputta that he, Sariputta did not know the nature of the past and the future Buddhas and so could not make this statement that Gautama Buddha was the best amongst all these Buddhas. The Buddha also said that all the past and future Buddhas preach the same Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path. This clearly shows that Gautama Buddha never had the idea of religious monopoly.

The method used to introduce the teachings of the Buddha was rational, unemotional, common sense reasoning. The teachings were presented with clear and impressive simplicity and yet they were kept free from religious and national narrowness and fanaticism. They made the people clear and sober in mind. This method of presentation appealed to the intellectual mind to accept Buddhism without any dogmas and without any superstitious beliefs. Thus did the teachings of the Buddha penetrate the hearts and minds of the people.

In his book, *The Discovery of India*, Mr. Nehru says: "Buddha had the courage to point out the unsatisfactoriness of popular religion superstition, ceremony, and priest craft. He was not interested in the metaphysical and theological outlook, miracles, revelations and dealings with supernatural. His appeal was to reason, logic and experience; his emphasis was on ethics and his method was one of psychological analysis, a psychology without a Soul. His whole approach comes like the breath of the fresh wind from the mountain after the stale air of metaphysical speculation."

Buddha says that one must not accept the Dharma out of reverence but only after investigation. Following the advice of the Buddha, Buddhists put reason in the place of authority to make room for the practical realities of life.

Thus Buddhism is not merely a religion but a true life of good living. Buddhism is the religion of salvation from evils by enlightenment. It is also a spiritual commonwealth. In fact Buddhism has gone beyond the limit of religion.

Buddha was the product of a long evolution of virtue of good deeds, mental training and development and noble resolutions extending through countless ages and culminating in a being higher than the supernatural beings.

HOW THE MESSAGE OF THE BUDDHA WAS INTRODUCED

Buddha's message was an invitation to all to join the fold of universal brotherhood to work in strength for the welfare of mankind.

The Buddha's first missionaries were Arahants. Before sending out these disciples, he advised them in this manner:

“Go forth, O Bhikkhus, and wander for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, in compassion for the world, for the good, for the welfare of gods and men, proclaim the Dharma, the doctrine; preach a life of holiness, perfect and pure.”

According to this advice, the Buddha wanted to tell the people the difference between good and bad and he wanted to teach them how to lead a happy, peaceful and righteous life. But he never mentioned that his disciples should go and convert people into Buddhists. Whenever he advised his disciples either to do something or to keep away from something, he always asked them to think not only their own welfare and happiness but also the welfare and happiness of others. He said, “If it is good for you and others then do it, on the other hand if it is bad for you and others do not do that.”

More than two hundred years after the Buddha, Emperor Asoka, who ruled in India, devoted much of his time for the upliftment of Buddhism and Buddhist culture. Instead of reinforcing his army, Asoka tried to introduce the peace message of the Buddha to counter those who violated others' peace. He also sent out Buddhist missionaries to many parts of the world to convey the peace message of the Buddha. Yet he never forgot to advise those missionaries not to condemn or to run down any other religion while they preach Buddhism. This advice was engraved on an Asoka-pillar in Brahmi characters; the ruins of this pillar can still be seen today at Sarnath, Benares, India.

After observing this Asoka Pillar, Nehru writes, “At Sarnath near Benares, I could almost see the Buddha preaching his first sermon, and some of his recorded words would come like a distant echo to me through two thousand five hundred years. Asoka's pillars of stone with their inscriptions would speak to me in their magnificent language and tell me of a man who, though an emperor, was greater than any king or emperor.”

Who believed that Asoka who was stigmatized Canda (wicked) on account of the atrocities caused by him to expand his empire, would ever win the noble title Dharmasoka – Asoka the Righteous? But he did completely change his career to such an extent and became a follower of the most compassionate Buddha.

Asoka sent missionaries to other countries. He erected thousands of temples and pagodas and organized various charitable institutions such as hospitals. He was concerned with the welfare of human beings as well as poor helpless animals. When he introduced Buddhism to countries beyond the borders of India, he was not interested in personal gain or in political power. His aim was to introduce the peace message of the Buddha to the people so that they could lead a righteous way of life. His 'metta' or loving kindness for all living beings was so great that he engraved on one of his rock pillars an inscription with the message that he treated every human being as his own son and daughter.

Despite his greatness, Emperor Asoka had been criticized by some Indian historians for having too much religious tolerance and for following a doctrine of non-violence. They

pointed out that since Asoka relied on these doctrines, he did not build up the military forces to protect the country and hence left the country open and unprotected to foreign invaders. The argument presented by these historians is correct. However, we believe that Emperor Asoka was more correct and honest.

H.G. Wells inspired by his greatness says, “amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousness and serenities and royal highness and the like, the name of Asoka shines and shines almost alone, a star.”

Certain fanatical Buddhists also used to criticize Asoka for giving too much room and support to other religions. But as a ruler it is his duty to support every existing religion and not act in such a way as to hinder the progress of other religions. By observing how he supported the other religions, some scholars have gone to the extent to say that Asoka was not a Buddhist. But he has done all his duties and dispensed justice for the welfare of everybody as a real follower of the Buddha.

We want to live peacefully and harmoniously without disturbing or attacking other kingdoms or countries. But if others do not allow us to live peacefully and if they become aggressive and attack our country by force, who is to be blamed?

The world and the people are so much corrupted and crazy for power that innocent people are not allowed to live peacefully. They come and drag the innocent ones into the battle field and persuade others to come out and fight and kill. When such situations arise, certainly it is difficult for people to practise the loving kindness and non-violence taught by the Buddha. However, selfish men are responsible for such cruel acts; but not those who try to live according to their religious principles.

Religious principles are intended for the whole of mankind. If one particular section of humanity does not follow good religious virtues such as tolerance, patience, kindness, understanding and a peaceful way of life it is difficult for others to live peacefully. It is natural that cunning and cruel people can take advantage of any kind of virtues.

When people found some religious moral principles are difficult for them to practise they say, religion is out of date. In fact it is not religion that is out of date but such people are out of date because of their mental capacity and thus became a danger to society. They try to bring down the religious principles to the level of their corrupted way of life. Another important point is that many people take the liberty to violate moral principles with the lame excuse that certain immoral practices are now a common practice amongst the public; hence they try to justify their wrong-doings. Moral principles as established are not changeable like certain manners and customs and must be upheld at all times. Excuses must not be made to violate established principles.

BUDDHA AS A RELIGIOUS REVOLUTIONIST

In the days of the Buddha, the Brahmins were the priests who conducted most of the religious rites and rituals in India. The Brahmins were the learned people and the teachers; they controlled religious activities. They also introduced various practices and beliefs in the name of religion.

After observing how people practised those religions that were controlled by the Brahmins, the Buddha had to become a religious revolutionist. He did not accept everything taught by some religious teachers as truths. He rejected many beliefs and practices in which he could not find truth. For example, he did not accept the religious authorities who claimed that, "A speech uttered by the Brahmins, whether a curse or a benefaction, never fails to come true." To the Buddha there is no real value of a religion if service to mankind, reality and enlightenment are not there. At the same time, he accepted certain teachings that were reasonable.

Although the Buddha pointed out there was no religious value in many of the practices in India during his time, he had the courtesy to advise his followers to give alms or food to the Brahmins and other monks and to support them irrespective of their religion. The Buddha advised his followers not to hurt or to cause injury to a *Sramana* (monk) or a Brahmin. Here he has accommodated monks and Brahmins as religious people. Again the Buddha said that when a person deceives a Brahmin or a monk or pauper by telling a lie, this is a cause of the downfall of that person. Thus in advising his followers in this manner the Buddha had treated all of them without any discrimination.

The Buddha did not introduce the same old teachings that existed in the religions of India at that time. In fact, if he had wanted to introduce a religious way of life and beliefs according to the same old thought pattern, it was not necessary for him to sacrifice everything and work so hard to gain supreme enlightenment which he could not find from any other religious teacher at the time.

The Buddha's way of expression of the views is not like the ordinary philosophers or great thinkers or not even like a messenger of God. We can hear a new voice which we have never heard before in the religious field through his teachings. His teachings is free from egoism.

Instead of presenting the same old teachings, the Buddha threw new light into the religious life and beliefs and explained the real meaning and purpose of a religion in a proper perspective. Before his explanations of religious way of life, people had never thought or heard of that type of rational and liberal interpretation of religion. This is why today Buddhism is being introduced as a religion of freedom and reason by intellectuals. The Buddha's teachings are such that anyone can practice them without any religious labels.

The Buddha did not share the fatalistic view that mere birth decided once and for all on a man's station in life because his conduct (*kamma*) in this life itself was even a more important factor than the result of past *kamma*. Buddha clearly discounted the fatalistic philosophical notion that all the experiences of a man in the present life are totally determined by his previous actions alone or that they were immutably fixed by some divine scheme nor did he subscribe to the view that they were simply fortuitous and happened without any cause, that is to say, birth was not a mere accident.

He gave entirely different, rational interpretations to certain religious teachings such as: *karma*, *dharma*, rebirth, heaven and hell and *moksha* or *nirvana*. The Buddha gave a religious twist to the thoughts of his time. These religious concepts were generally

accepted by many people. He pointed out the cruelty of the animal sacrifices offered in the name of God to please him and receive his blessings and protection.

Also, the Buddha did not encourage the people to take a holy bath in the so-called holy rivers. He never believed that people could wash away their sins simply by taking a bath. The Buddha has interpreted 'holy bath' as to taking bath in morality. The Buddha also pointed out the futility of fire-God worship and interpreted it as respecting father and mother. Again he has pointed out the meaningless of worship of directions or quarters and enlightened the people by telling them the real meaning of worshipping the quarters as respecting and fulfilling the duties towards parents, teachers, wife and children, friends, servants and the wise ones. Worshipping of the sun and the moon was also very common not only in those days but also at this space age amongst certain people; but the Buddha did not accept that there is any religious value in such practices.

Also the Buddha rejected the belief that worshipping and making offerings in the name of God can benefit a person for moral and spiritual development and final salvation. Buddha relied on reason and experience. He advised people to seek the truth in their own minds.

He also rejected the general belief that existed in India at that time – the belief that man can easily find his salvation if he tortures his physical body by observing certain religious vows and penalties. On the other hand, he also pointed out that the materialistic view of only indulging the senses as the purpose of life is wrong. In this way he introduced what real religious life is.

The Buddha did not criticise or condemn any religion other than to enlighten the people by showing them the futility of such performances which they had been practising in the name of religion.

As a result of rejecting the many existing superstitious beliefs in the name of religion, Buddhists had to suffer. And Buddhism was driven away from India by those who had powers in their hands and who wanted to maintain the same beliefs as real religious practices for their own benefit.

To the Buddha, a religious life or holy life could not be achieved only by praying and offerings or by following some religious dogmas, traditions and customs. To him, a religious life could be achieved through abstaining from evils committed by thought, word and action. However, he introduced this rational religious method without violating the peace among the public. He managed to shake the whole world by revolutionizing many religious beliefs and practices without any bloodshed – a task which others failed to do.

The Buddha was not the only one to point out the weakness of such religious beliefs and way of life. Modern Indian thinkers also offer their criticisms.

Mr. Nehru, former Prime Minister of India and a liberal minded, brilliant Indian leader, said, "The day to day religion of the orthodox Hindu is more concerned with what to eat and what not to eat, who to eat with and from whom to keep away rather than with spiritual values. The rules and the regulations of the kitchen dominate his social life."

Swami Vivekananda, a fearless Hindu religious teacher and a talented speaker, has very strongly criticised the Brahminical way of religious life stating that their religion is in the kitchen and their God is in the cooking pot.

INDIAN INTELLECTUALS INSPIRED BY THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

Many of the Indian social and political reformers, great thinkers, philosophers and writers have appreciated and have been inspired by the teachings of the Buddha:

* **Sankaracharya** whose name was very famous in India **as a** reformer of Hinduism and as an enemy of Buddhism who has condemned Buddhist Philosophy, says: "Buddha is an emperor amongst yogies."

* **Dr. Dasgupta**, a well-known philosopher in India, says: "Hindu system of Philosophy might have lost much of its depth-interest and value if they could not assimilate much from Buddhism."

* **Dr. Radhakrishnan**, a well-known philosopher and a former president of India, says: "Buddha is the maker of modern Hinduism."

In his Dhammapada, Dr. Radhakrishnan says. "In the Buddha we have a master mind from the East second to none so far as the influence on the thought and life of the human race is concerned, and sacred to all as the founder of a religious tradition whose hold is hardly less wide and deep than any other"

He also says: "Buddha was the first to throw intelligent light on the mind process."

Again, he says: "If Buddhism appealed to the modern mind, it was empirical, scientific and not based on any dogma."

Concerning Buddhist Philosophy, Dr. Radhakrishnan says: "As much as man's understanding capacity is deep, Buddhist Philosophy is the only teaching that can penetrate into the bottom of that deep knowledge."

* **Dr. Altekar**, Prof. at Benares Hindu University, says: "It is difficult to imagine what Indian culture would have been like if it had not been enriched by the manifold influences radiating from Buddhism.

* **Mahatma Gandhi** says: "Hinduism owes eternal debt to that Great Teacher, the Buddha."

* **Dr. S. P. Mukerjee** says: "As a religion, Buddhism has moved to the hearts of hundreds of millions, especially in many parts of Asia. As a philosophy, it has attracted the notice of thinkers and scholars not only in Asia alone but throughout the civilized world."

* **Swami Vivekananda** who once said, "I like the Buddha but not his teachings." He also said: "The world has never seen such a great, fearless teacher of ethic. He is the greatest of all the sages."

He also introduced the Buddha with the following words: "Show me in history one character who has soared so high above all. The whole human race has produced but one such person, such high philosophy, such wide sympathy. The great philosopher, preaching the highest philosophy, yet has the deepest of sympathy for the lowest of animals, and never puts forward a claim for himself. He is the ideal Karma yogi, acting entirely without motive; and the history of humanity shows him to have been the greatest man ever born, beyond compare, the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed."

* **Rabindranath Tagore**, a well-known Indian poet, says: " Buddhism was the first spiritual force known to us in the history."

Tagore also says: "The whole life story of the Buddha is a wonderful poem. It is so fascinating, attractive and artistic that I have never read such a wonderful poem."

* **Mr. Nehru** says: "The Path that the Buddha showed is, I believe, the only Path humanity must tread if it is to escape disaster."

Mr. Nehru also says: "His message, old and yet very new and original for those immersed in metaphysical subtleties, captured the imagination of the intellectuals. It went deep down into the hearts of the people."

Again, he says: "The production of the Buddha is the highest honour so far gained in the history of the world."

Regarding the analysis of the life according to the Buddha, Nehru says: "The Buddha's method was one of psychological analysis and again, it is surprising to find out how deep was his insight into this latest of modern sciences. Man's life was considered and examined without any reference to a permanent self. The mind was looked upon as part of the body, a composite of mental forces. The individual thus became a bundle of mental states, the self is just a stream of ideas. All that we are is the result of what we have thought. He further says: 'According to the Buddha, it is all a question of self-development, not grace. And if a person succeeds in developing along these lines and conquers himself, there can be no defeat for him: 'Not even a god can change into defeat the victory of man who has vanquished himself.'

Subas Chandra Bose says: "If we can live ourselves according to the teaching of the Buddha we shall live better lives not only as individuals, but as a nation."

NON INTERFERENCE WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

The greatest contribution that we Buddhists have made in relation to other religions is our non-interference with other religious practices. In the history of the world, there is no evidence to show that Buddhists have interfered or done any damage to any other religions in any part of the world.

Another contribution that we Buddhists have made to other religions is that we have never tried to convert others through various kinds of exploitation. We can do an

excellent social service to others by keeping away from all sorts of evil practices and by living without disturbing others, and by showing our kindness, honesty, compassion, patience, tolerance and understanding.

Is it not a social service if we can change the cruel mind of a man who violates the peace and happiness of innocent people to a cultured and harmless man? We can render social service not only by providing material help but also by practising good virtues. Buddhists try to convert people to be religious. They try to make people who have no religion to understand the importance and the value of religion. For those who are cruel, cunning and dishonest, we advise them to follow some religious principles. At the same time, we advise people to practise their own religion according to their respective customs and traditions (if they are harmless) and not to discriminate against others. Besides, we are not interested in asking people to change their religious labels.

BUDDHA AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

If the Buddha is to be regarded as a social reformer it must be granted that He began at a point which no other social reformer before or since has touched - in depth psychology. He went to the deepest roots of human ill, which are in the human mind. It is only there that true reform can be effected. Reforms imposed upon the external world by force – which is to say by hate – have a very short life because they have no roots. But those which spring from a transformation in man's inner consciousness remain rooted there, and while their branches spread outwards they draw their nourishment from an unfailling source, the subconscious imperatives of the lifestream itself. So reforms come about when men's minds have prepared the way for them, and they live so long as men revitalise them from their own love of truth, justice and their fellow men.

Buddhist principles contain no admonition of allegiance to a particular person, god or prophet, nor do they contain and hint that they were formulated to suit the need of any particular section of people in their tribal or national life. They have the quality of universalism which Bertrand Russell, and all those who follow the trend of his thought, require that moral principles should have. They are not products of a tribal system, aimed at preserving the unity of a special group of people, or rules prescribed in accordance with customs and needs of men living in a particular part of the world. They stand beyond space and time and it is because of this that they have been able to survive unchanged through 2,500 years of troubled history and still remain for us the clearest and noblest guide to conduct that mankind has ever been given.

WHY RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

When we study how religions have influenced people over long periods of time, we can understand the terrible mistakes that people have committed through religious intolerance. A special word, "persecution", is used to describe the brutalities, the cruelties and the intolerance done in the name of religion. Enlightened religious teachers have introduced their religions with the intention of bringing peace and happiness. But some people introduced their religion by way of coercion and threat. The history of the world shows us very sad instances regarding this sort of religious intolerance. Some misguided followers have introduced the religion of their teacher by

adopting entirely wrong and very questionable methods. In fact, they have introduced irreligion in the name of the peace message of their religion.

Why have all these unfortunate occurrences taken place? We can only conjecture the reasons. One reason is probably the lack of understanding of the other man's religion; another reason is that some people have misused religion for gaining more power into their hands. And the other reason is the jealous and selfish attitude that some people have to other religious beliefs and cultural activities.

During a recent conference on world peace, one of the speakers mentioned that Japan would never have declared war if the Japanese people could only have realised the attitude and the way of life of the Americans and Europeans. And the Americans, on the other hand, stated that they would never have used the atomic bombs if they had realised the real feelings of the Japanese people and their way of life. In other words, due to misunderstanding or ignorance, people created trouble and miseries for one another. These observations are also true for religion: when one religious group misunderstands another, then trouble arises. This is the reason why some people say that it is better to live without having any religion. They point out that people who have religions are the people who discriminate against each other and the result is that mankind is divided in the name of religion; and hence religious discrimination tends to produce anger and jealousy. Therefore, those who have no religion, are more united than those who boast about their own respective religion.

Many people have not yet realised the real purpose of a religion. They also have not yet realised that religion is for us to find unity, peace and happiness. Some argue and ask, that if unity, peace and happiness cannot be found amongst so-called religionists, why then do we need religion? More and more people are keeping away from religion as they come to know how religionists misuse their own religions. Some intellectuals have gone to the extent of boldly proclaiming that religions have done more harm than good to mankind. Whether these intellectuals are right or wrong, they do give us some thing to ponder seriously if we are going to make religion meaningful. When some people see how the followers of two different denominations within the same religion, cut each other's throats, how can people accept, appreciate, and justify that religion is important for the welfare of mankind. If the so-called religious authorities have not yet learned how to live with harmony and mutual understanding among themselves, then what sort of peace message can they offer to others? Although there are different sects in Buddhism, yet happily there are no signs of any conflict amongst these sects. They are the results of the dynamic character of Buddhism. For Buddhists, there exists unity in diversity.

Actually, there is nothing wrong with religion but either there is something wrong with man or with the methods that man uses to introduce and to practise religion. This is perhaps why people sometimes get fed up with religions.

Another type of religious intolerance can be found amongst certain orthodox as well as lopsided religious organisers who have not learned how to introduce or organise religious activities in a systematic manner in modern society. Such people are doing more harm than good to religion. They hinder the progress of religious activities due to their ignorance. Their ideas are like stagnant water, polluted and smelly.

It has been mentioned elsewhere in this book that many religious activities, performed in the name of religion today, were not introduced by the founders of the various religions but instituted by the followers of those religions from time to time. Some of those practices are useful and meaningful but some are ridiculous. However, when we come to know that certain practices are meaningful and not misleading and not violating the basic principles of religions or morality, then it is the duty of understanding people to tolerate them whether they are familiar with such practices or not.

Those who insist on reference to established books for everything, even organising some simple religious activities, are not considered as understanding people.

On the other hand many religionists have incorporated some so-called religious practices which are not found in their original teachings in order to introduce their religions and to preserve them. This action is unavoidable in the process of development of religious beliefs and practices to meet the need of the people. However, in so doing the real essence or the spiritual aspects of religion is bound to fade away, and cause people to value a religion in terms of worldly material gain and the cause of unhealthy religious competition.

To many people, immoral practices become moral under certain circumstances when necessities arise. At that time religion also has been called in to justify such deeds, but Buddhist morality, explained by the Buddha is not changeable for the advantage of men's selfish desire.

ARE RELIGIONS OUT OF DATE ?

Many thinkers believe that all these religions are out of date and we must have a different religion which will appeal to the modern mind. They also believe that there will be no future for all the existing religions. At the same time some people believe that we must create one religion by taking the essence of existing religions. This task is not easy as long as individualism, egoism, selfishness, illusion and ignorance prevail in man's mind. According to those thinkers the religion that would appeal to future generations should be as follows:

" The religion of the future will plant itself under the broad free canopy of heaven and drink in the wide open eyes, the steaming noon-day revelations from the living god - the light which comes from nature, from science, from history, from human experience, from every point of the universe."

It seems that these thinkers are under the impression that there is no real truth in existing religions. However, if there is truth there cannot be any untruth; the difficulty lies in the understanding of truth.

Certain world famous scientists and philosophers have predicted that the religion of the future in this world will be Buddhism if a religion is to be needed in future. They also have said that this will be the only religion which cannot be refuted by scientists and great thinkers.

They might have come to this conclusion by observing what people believe and practise in the name of religion by studying the nature of the human mind which is influenced by the modern science and technology and also by investigating the teachings of the Buddha.

If Buddhism is good enough to be the future religion of this world it must recapture the spirit of the universal teaching introduced by the Buddha with its vital principles of service, purity, wisdom and compassion but not in the manner in which Buddhism is practised by many people today in many parts of the world.

By reconciling religion with scientific knowledge, Buddhism can restore the lost spiritual values and open the way to the next stage of man's destiny.

First and foremost religious authorities and leaders must set an example to others by showing their sincerity and understanding. They need not imitate the stage wrestlers who fight for money. These wrestlers first shake hands and then they start beating each other without any mercy. We must not shake hands with other religious denominations in the manner of the stage wrestlers. We must not use religion to play this kind of game.

Some wrestlers when offering their hands to their opponent, will take advantage of catching the opponent off-guard and attacking him. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that some religionists also practise this same type of 'wrestling' in the religious field by taking advantage of the other man's tolerance. This should not be the attitude of religious people. Religious people must be honest; they must be kind; they must have more tolerance and patience than an ordinary person; they must have sympathy and understanding and they must work for the welfare of others irrespective of their religions.

Regarding the nature of Buddhist religious tolerance, Francis Story, an eminent Buddhist scholar gives his opinion as follows: "we must remark that the definition of tolerance does not assert that we must or should ourselves adopt the beliefs or practices of others, when these are alien to our own and our own are seemingly better. It is only necessary that we should admit to others the right we claim for ourselves. But this is the first point at which, of the definition of tolerance is not clear, the practice of it may slip over into becoming a weakness. In practising tolerance, people sometimes carry it to the extreme of trying to incorporate into their own beliefs than those of others. It is a weakness to which Buddhists are more prone than most people, and is often the result of a misguided excess of amiability. But in other instances this "near enemy" of tolerance is actually its opposite; it springs from an inability to tolerate anyone else's ideas unless one can, by some mental gymnastics make them one's own. It is a proof of the inability to agree to disagree. One who is so constituted finds it the only way in which he can resolve the difficulty without conflict. The Buddha's tolerance was that of a strong and vigorous mind which understands the limitations of other minds, and whilst not compromising with untruth, does not attempt to force truth into unwilling ears. True Buddhist tolerance, then, should as far as possible follow the pattern set by the Buddha himself; that is to say, it should allow others to hold and to follow whatever beliefs they choose, so long as they are incapable of realising any higher truth. But it does not insist that Buddhists should approve of what others believe or give their assent to it when it goes against the basic teachings of the Master. Neither does it demand that Buddhists

should submit to pressures from the followers of other religions who try to impose their own ideas by force where they can, and by persuasion where they cannot.”

(The Buddhist Outlook)

DEFINITION OF A RELIGIOUS MAN

In the eyes of the Buddha, every man is a religious man if he is good, sincere, honest, kind and if he lives without disturbing others. Such a person can be a follower of any religion or even a person without any religious brand. Yet if such a person could manage to purify his mind from various defilements or evil thoughts, then he will be able to enjoy a happy, peaceful, contented life and finally attain everlasting happiness.

If a man is good, he is naturally religious. It makes no difference whether he is a Buddhist, Muslim, Christianity or Hindu. We treat him as a religious man. Naturally people follow different traditional and cultural practices in the name of religion. These practices originated according to the conditions and way of life that helped to give birth to the particular religion. The various religions developed in different ways according to different social, economic and intellectual patterns of the time, according to the existing spiritual problems of the time, and according to the various climatic conditions and political issues. Thus there is no reason to discriminate against others on the basis of different practices, manners and traditions. At the same time, we also can be religious without any of those traditions. Also, there is no need to follow meaningless traditions in the name of religion.

Only three things are required for a man to be religious: he must have good thoughts, use good words and practise good deeds.

It is not easy for a person to prove that he is more religious than others just because he worships and prays so many times a day or by making offerings in the name of a god or a religious teacher. We believe that the only way to be religious is by following good religious principles to develop our moral and spiritual aspects of our life. There may be some people who observe such good virtues and principles and serve mankind without any selfish motive and without praying to anybody. From the Buddhist point of view, such people are more religious than those who practise a religion only by praying and making offerings with selfish motives.

Religious teachers criticise the behaviour of laymen without following their own self discipline and at the same time laymen criticise the behaviour of religious teachers and try to correct one another without following their own religious discipline.

The Buddha has advised those who listen to him to live in accordance with his Dharma. If they live with the Dharma, they will be protected by this very Dharma; because Dharma is the cosmic law. There is no need to expect protection from external sources; people can protect themselves by living a righteous way of life that is in accordance with the universal law: Dharma. Also, by living the Dharma, we protect others by allowing others to live peacefully and without disturbing them. The Buddha says that if people violate the cosmic law, they will be in trouble and will have to face the consequences. From the Buddhist point of view it is impossible even for a god to change the reactions of violating this universal law. Therefore it is our duty to co-operate with the cosmic law

if we want to live peacefully in this world and if we want to avoid confronting various dangerous influences.

ARE THERE REAL FREE THINKERS?

Many people claim that they are free thinkers and that they are not interested in any religion. Not only that, they also hate and condemn every religion by saying that religion is a hindrance to man and worldly progress, and blindfolds the man instead of enlightening him. This is a wrong attitude. If they do not like religion, they can reject it but should not hate or condemn and harbour prejudices. They can say that they are not interested in religion and have no time to devote for that. Many of those so-called free thinkers are having the wrong impression about religion by observing the wrong interpretations and practices of religions. They have never studied and realised the real meaning and value or purpose of a religion. Some say that they were born in a Buddhist family, and their parents, being Buddhists, use joss sticks for prayers. It seems that these so-called free thinkers have only learned joss sticks in the practice of religion.

Who is a free thinker? Some of these so-called free thinkers pretend they are free thinkers since they are too lazy to study a religion. If such people are real free thinkers they must adopt the principle of freedom everywhere in society. They should maintain their freedom without adopting any traditions, customs and manners in society. However, they are bound by customs and traditions in society. Why then should they claim to be free thinkers only in the field of religion? In fact, real free thinkers are only found in lunatic asylums where the inmates are not bound by any customs, traditions or manners.

Some people say they can live in this world as cultured and civilised people without following a religion, but when they behave as cultured and civilised people, are they not following certain religious principles, as these principles are the very essence of religion, inducing man to behave as cultured people?

There are some free thinkers who say man must be free from religion. They say religion is not important for man. But even with religion, man sometimes behave worse than animals. What would be the position without religion? Man can be a free thinker without any religious label, but he must have some religious principles.

In spite of all sorts of laws imposed by the Government, moral and ethical principles introduced by religion and certain social laws and manners, man behaves like a dangerous creature who violates the peace and happiness of innocent people by seizing every opportunity to do cruel and wicked acts to quench his sensuous desire. What would be the position if such laws and principles are not imposed?

Buddhism encourages people to have a free mind to judge anything unbiasedly, without prejudices, but not the sceptical way of a free thinker.

Those who have developed only their knowledge by neglecting the moral and spiritual aspects of their life are intellectual fools.

Now let us see the behaviour of animals. There are no organised laws or religious principles or ethics to govern their behaviour. They follow the natural law. But we, being

human beings crooked and cunning, must have some extra laws, ethics and religious principles to govern our behaviour. This world can be destroyed by man but not by animals.

Animal kingdom also is not safe in man's hands. Primitive people used to kill animals to satisfy their hunger, but modern civilised men destroy animals for fun. The natural beauty of certain rare animals and birds is disappearing through the cruel hands of man.

It is not that man wants to occupy the land by destroying wild lives but it is due to his incapability of controlling the wild nature within him.

Therefore, religious principles are very important for the human society. Religion is necessary to straighten the crookedness of the man's mind. There is no worldly progress without man's progress. Man's progress must be achieved by his self discipline and mental culture, gained through certain religious principles. If there is fear, insecurity and suspicion prevalent in the man's mind, where can we find the progress of the world? The real progress of the world can be achieved when man behaves as a cultured, reliable and understanding man.

We should not measure worldly progress only in terms of huge buildings, wider roads, quick transport, big machinery equipment and certain modern facilities provided for man to lead an easy and lazy life to be more crazy.

Modern cities are nothing but concrete jungles populated by so-called human beings, some of whom are more dangerous than the four-legged animals in the natural jungle. Thus many people think it is better to live in a jungle where they can find more peace.

The world is overpopulated; and yet each and every man experiences loneliness. Why? Because it is too difficult for one man to trust another man.

WHAT IS THE TRUE RELIGION?

Concerning this question: what is the true religion? The Buddha has given a liberal answer. He said that if you can find the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Noble Path and if you can find genuine followers who have gained spiritual development through that religion then you can also accept that religion as a true religion. Notice that he did not say that Buddhism is the only true religion in this world.

Most of you perhaps already know the real meaning of the religious terms 'four noble truths and eight noble path'.

Four noble truths mean: (i) realization of the unsatisfactoriness of this life; (ii) the knowledge that there is a cause for this unsatisfactoriness; (iii) the understanding that there is an end to this unsatisfactoriness; and (iv) the practical method to follow in order to end this unsatisfactoriness.

The real meaning of enlightenment of the Buddha is the realisation of the nature of these four noble truths. A student of comparative religion must try to find out whether

the same noble truths and the Eightfold Path can be found, as explained by the Buddha, in other religions.

The Eightfold Noble Path is also known as the middle path and the Buddhist way of life. This path is as follows:-

1. Try to understand things properly.
2. Try to understand how to think properly.
3. Try to understand how to speak gently.
4. Try to understand how to behave properly without disturbing others.
5. Try to understand how to earn your livelihood without hurting and cheating others.
6. Try to understand how to make use your effort without misusing or wasting it.
7. Try to understand how to develop the awareness of thoughts, words, and actions.
8. Try to understand how to control your mind: to get rid of all the evil thoughts and to cultivate the mind.

BUDDHISM AND SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

God-Idea

What is the Buddhist attitude towards the various supernatural beings? Let us begin with the highest of the super natural beings: if the God-idea is important to man's moral and spiritual development, there is no reason for Buddhists to object to such a belief. However according to Swami Vivekananda's view; "This universe has not been created by any extra-cosmic God, nor is it the work of any outside genius. It is self-creating, self-dissolving, self-manifesting." Nevertheless, to many people, the God-idea is a very useful belief in that it helps man to avoid committing evil because of the fear of God's punishment; and so some people do some good and expect a reward from God. The God-idea is not only useful but perhaps sometimes necessary; Voltaire says: "Even if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." But there are no Buddha words to support the idea of an almighty, omniscient and omnipotent God to whom people can pray in order to attain their final goal. People must work for the final goal through the purification of the mind. Mr. Nehru says, "Even if God exists, it may be desirable not to look up to Him or to rely on Him. Too much dependence on supernatural factors may lead and has often led to loss of self-reliance in man and to a blunting of his capacity and creative ability." Buddhists are encouraged to rely on their own efforts for spiritual progress and salvation.

The Buddha did not introduce himself as the mouthpiece of God in order to convey any message given by the God. In this respect, his teaching is not a revealed religion. Instead, Buddha has given due credit to man for his intelligence. He did not want to narrow the thinking power of the human mind by representing himself as a messenger of someone else.

Regarding the divine revelation Mr. Nehru says: “this seems to me to be peculiarly unfortunate for this we miss the real significance – the unfolding of the human mind in the earliest stage of thought and what a wonderful mind it was.”

Supernatural Beings

Although the Buddha did not support the Creator God-idea, he has not denied the existence of supernatural living beings. However, these supernatural beings are also not really essential for Buddhists to practice their religion for the attainment of final salvation – nirvana. The belief in supernatural beings is not indispensable for the intellectuals to make use of their life in this world and the here-after. Regarding the supernatural beings, Mr. Nehru again says, “As knowledge advances, the domain of religion, in the narrow sense of the word, shrinks. The more we understand the life and nature, the less we look for supernatural causes. Whatever we can understand and control, ceases to be a mystery.

Therefore, the Buddhist concept of God is different from that of other religions. Those who have not understood this concept of God, condemn the Buddha as an atheist or nihilist. However, we do not regard the Buddha as an atheist or nihilist; and neither do we regard the Buddha as a ‘theist’ as explained in other religions. To eternalists, Buddha is an annihilationist, since he has preached Anatta doctrine. To annihilationists Buddha is an eternalist, since he has preached rebirth. Actually, the Buddha had more confidence in truth and good than in God. After all, there are many who deny the existence of God, but no one can deny the existence of truth and good. Buddhists do not have the illusion that Buddhist gods are the only true gods and that all other gods are false gods. At the same time they also do not conceive the idea that Buddhist gods will punish them if they respect any other god. If gods really exist Buddhist can respect them. If there are no such gods, then they also can practise their religion without them.

The Heavens

If there are supernatural beings, they must be in certain places. In religious terms, these places are referred to as heavens. Regarding the heavenly bliss, the Buddha once said to Kutadanta: “You are anxious about heaven, but you cannot see the bliss of righteousness and the immortality of Truth... self is death and truth is life.” Then who is admitted to the heavens and how is he admitted? A good explanation is offered by Dr. D. H. De A. Wijesekara, Professor of Sanskrit at University of Ceylon: “Buddhist knows that while he is living an ordinary life and enjoying the pleasures of the world he is not going to win the final goal; but he believes that if he leads a good life his next existence will be a happy one.” Thus it is generally said that the Dhamma well practised conduces to happiness, and is the best of worldly goods for a man. It should be now clear that this Norm of the Buddhist social ethic is not claimed to be the monopoly of Buddhism and altogether confined to the Buddhists, but it is the ‘good old rule’ handed down from the past. One who lives up to his Norm is called ‘one established in the Norm’ (*dhammattha*) or ‘one living the Norm’ (*dhammajivi*) or ‘one practising the Norm’ (*dhamma-cari*). Therefore in the popular parts of the canon this Dhamma is specifically called ‘the path to heaven’ (*sagga-patha*) or ‘the way to heaven’

(*sagga-magga*). The idea of the 'path' here implies the psychologically practical nature of the Norm of social morality, as much as in the case of the Noble Eightfold Path."

MIRACLES OF SUPERNATURAL POWERS

Regarding miracles or supernatural powers, Ven. Dr. Rahula, a well-known Buddhist scholar says: "Supernormal powers that we gain through mental culture, mental discipline, are not denied in Buddhism. To hear sounds or speeches far away, or to penetrate another person's mind with your own or to see a person's situation or things happening far away. Also to walk on water as on earth and to fly in the air. But they are not considered important or valuable in Buddhism.'

The Buddha did not approve of miracles or supernormal powers because they do not give any real understanding and cannot take one to the final enlightenment. When the Buddha was seeking his own enlightenment he met several religious teachers who could perform miracles; but he could not be satisfied with such supernormal powers because he knew there is no relation of truth or enlightenment through those practices. That is why the Buddha advised his disciples not to exhibit any supernormal power for the name and fame that they might acquire. The Buddha once said, "It is a shameful thing for a spiritual man to show his supernormal power. It is like a woman dancing naked for a wretched coin."

The Buddha also did not approve of miracles as a method of introducing his teachings. He said that performing miracles was not the correct method to adopt for conversion of people into a religion. He pointed out that some people after witnessing a person's miraculous powers, might follow that person for some time just for curiosity sake. But the miracles do not give any real understanding of the teachings that lead to enlightenment and to salvation. Therefore, there is no real religious value in the type of conversion that involves miracles.

Scientists do not attribute any reality to miracles. In the eyes of the enlightened teachers, miracles are like children's plays.

RELIGIONISTS MUST CO-OPERATE

There is no reason for religionists to hate one another and to harbour jealousy. Other religionists are also working for peace and are guiding the public to be better citizens. Let all religionists unite to abolish racial arrogance, national barriers, hindrances to cultural development and other kinds of discrimination.

Let all religionists unite not to use religious militarism. Let them unite to stop all the brutality and man-slaughter in the name of war. Let them unite to give freedom to man to find a religion according to his own conviction. Let them unite to give up religious monopoly. Let them unite not to use religion in the market place to convert others by adopting questionable methods. Let them unite to respect the other man's religious beliefs and practices as long as these beliefs

and practices are harmless and do not mislead the public. Let them unite to wipe out the challenging attitude of unhealthy religious competition. Let all religionists unite to eliminate the various vices and immoral practices that are common in our modern society. Let them also unite to introduce the moderate way of life amongst their followers and advise them not to go to extremes.

Dr. L. M. Joshi of Punjab University says: "The unity among the religions of mankind, if and when achieved, will be one of the greatest blessings on this earth. Certainly we cannot bring about this unity by mystifying or misinterpreting their differences in origins and doctrines. We can perhaps contribute towards achieving harmony among the followers of different faiths by impartially and respectfully studying their doctrines, beliefs and practices."

Like the bee gathering honey from different flowers, the wise one sees only the good in all religions and accepts the essence of the different teachings. For example: Buddhism says, "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." The Taoist says, "Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss." The Christian says, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The Muslim says, "Do unto all men as you would they should do unto you, and reject for others what you would reject for yourself." The Hindu says, "Let no one do to others what he would not have done to himself."

Look at the aim and the similarity of all these religions. If we really practice the above mentioned religious advices, how can we find clashes and hatred amongst the followers of these religions?

In spite of such similarities amongst those religions, it is an intellectual hypocrisy or well-meaning lie to say all religions are the same. It would be more correct if we say that the aim of all these religions is the same; that is: to find our peace, eternal bliss and salvation. But the different methods adopted to achieve that aim by various religions are not the same and some of those methods are controversial; because some have used dubious methods to introduce their religion rather than convince the public through their religious principles.

If there are no differences, then there is nothing to talk about in terms of religious tolerance. However, religious tolerance is important amongst the followers of all religions for the simple reason that there are differences in religious beliefs and practices.

Of course, every religion teaches tolerance. But very unfortunately, it seems that one religion cannot tolerate the progress of another religion. This is not a healthy attitude. Pointing out the weaknesses of certain practices is one thing; but religious intolerance is another thing.

Some have not yet realized that all good religious men are working to serve the public according to their religious principles. They are also trying to enlighten people to live peacefully with understanding.

Why is it that sometimes the followers of one religious group treat another religious group as rivals? Why are they reluctant to show their smiling faces to other religionists? Why are they sometimes hostile to others and why do they refuse to co-operate with their good work? Why do some insult other religious people by calling names? Such people must understand that they are also working for human welfare but not to mislead the public.

The time has come for all religionists to forget their differences and misunderstandings. They can admit the past mistakes and then forget them. Now is the time for all religionists to co-operate with each other and to organize a unified religious body and to introduce and to protect religion. Religionists must learn to stop their crazy hostile attitude to other religions.

All religionists must work for the welfare of mankind without any ulterior motive; they must work without having any discrimination. The different beliefs and practices should not be a basis for discriminating each other. Religionists must stop blowing their own trumpets and stop insulting other religions.

One religious group has a tendency to attack or condemn another religious group. And in every country, there is at least one very strong, anti-religious group that is waiting to take the advantage of religious quarrels and to condemn every religion. As a result of such actions, more and more people keep away from religion.

Religionists must come together and work with each other. Mr. Gandhi once said, " I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, to be wholly Hindu, Christian or wholly Muslim, but I want it to be wholly tolerant with its religions working side by side with one another."

All religionists must work together to make people understand the value of devotion, ideal of truth, justice, dedicated service, charity and loving kindness – so universally accepted by religion.

Today in many parts of the world, young people are turning away from religion. They say, "Religion is not so important for our daily life. Religion is an unnecessary burden to mankind. Religions hinder the man's thinking power." These young people think that they can live very well without religion: the time has come for the authorities of all these religions to come together and discuss this matter, to consider this matter very seriously, and to find out a solution to convince the younger generation why religion is important and why religion must play an important role in their daily life.

Let us not forget these important points and thus make possible the achievement of the ultimate aim of religion.

The aim of the founders of different religion in this world was to do some service to mankind. They have done that service for the last few thousand years within their capacity, within their knowledge, and within their ability.

Later some of their disciples have associated the way of the life of those great teachers with all sorts of beautifully exaggerated stories to show their supernatural and miraculous powers. But those religious teachers who have served mankind through their superhuman efforts, experiences and enlightenment as normal religious teachers are more commendable. If they were not as successful as they expected, at least they have civilised many uncivilised and barbaric human beings all over the world. To achieve their aim they have adopted different methods. They held different views. They introduced different ideologies. They differed according to the circumstances prevailing at that time. There is therefore no reason whatsoever for the followers of other co-religionists to ridicule or look down upon the practices of a particular religion if those practices happened to be dissimilar to their own.

DAMAGES TO BUDDHISM

An enormous damage to Buddhism came from the Huns, a nomadic people from central Asia, who once invaded India. The Huns destroyed many Buddhist places of worship. One of the Hun's Kings, who was known as Trikotihant (which means: killer of millions of people) destroyed thousands of monasteries and stupas or pagodas in Gandhara province alone.

King Pushyamitra was another king who could not tolerate Buddhism. He announced that if anybody brought him the head of a Buddhist monk, he would give 100 dinars (a unit of currency at the time). So people began to slaughter monks and brought their heads to the king. People also might have killed ordinary laymen and shaved their heads to be handed over to the king.

Kumarila Bhatta, who lived in India, once gave orders to drive away all Buddhist monks from the province where he lived. He said that the teachings of the Buddha could not be accepted since the Buddha was not from the Brahmin caste. He compared the Buddha's teaching to pure milk in a container made of dog's skin. Although the milk is good, the container is impure and so the milk is not drinkable. However, the real reason why Brahmins did not agree to respect another religion is that they wanted to be the permanent masters and to maintain their religious monopoly. They could not agree with the Buddha's teaching since the Buddha had pointed out many weaknesses in their way of teachings. The Buddha said that the people should not be completely satisfied with the way of preaching and practising of the false and questionable religions that existed in India during that time. In this respect, the Buddha was straightforward. He accepted only the truth. He pointed out that the discrimination created by the Brahmins regarding the caste system, was entirely wrong. He said that a person cannot be condemned or honoured according to the caste that he belongs. Man becomes noble or ignoble according to his way of life, but not according to his birth.

Swami Vivekananda also has said: "Caste, which was necessary and desirable in its early forms, and meant to develop individuality and freedom, had become a monstrous degradation, the opposite of what it was meant to be and had cursed the masses. Caste was a form of social organisation which was and should be

kept separate from religion. Social organization should change with the changing times.” Passionately, Vivekananda condemned the meaningless metaphysical discussions and arguments about ceremonials and especially the *touch-me-notism* of the cooking-pot and our religion is: “don’t touch me, I am holy.”

The Buddha had also given full freedom to women folk to practise religion without any discrimination. Before the Buddha, women were not allowed to practise religion freely. In this respect, the Buddha’s way of teaching became a big problem to Brahmins. These were some of the reasons why certain Brahmins who came into power wanted to destroy Buddhism.

The destruction of the Buddhist religion was not limited to India. Followers of other religions in certain other countries also have destroyed Buddhist monasteries and other religious objects. For political reasons, Buddhist places of worship have been destroyed in some countries like Ceylon, China, Korea and Japan.

In the twentieth century, Buddhism has been destroyed in Tibet. When we read world history, we can understand how others have lighted the cities by burning religious institution. But Buddhists have illuminated the countries by peaceful methods and cheerful faces of the public and Buddhists have also dispelled the darkness of ignorance through wisdom and enlightenment. There were many beautiful Buddhist monasteries all over the country. Almost all of them were destroyed by those who could not tolerate the development of Buddhism and Buddhist culture. In many places they have burnt those monasteries and other religious institutions and Buddhist libraries containing countless religious works.

Here is another incident to illustrate how Buddhists have been treated by others: This incident took place in India about 700 years ago, at Nalanda Buddhist University. Nalanda was the first, well-established Buddhist university in the world where more than 10,000 students studied various aspects of Buddhism. When Nalanda was instituted 1523 years ago, there were 500 lecturers and professors staffing the institution. Scholars and students from far away countries used to go to Nalanda for their Buddhist research work. I-Tsing, a Chinese pilgrim and a student of Buddhism, studied there for 10 years. He made mention of the vast collection of Buddhist and non-Buddhist literature. He said that there were 8 separate reading rooms attached to the library. Nalanda could be introduced as the Oxford university of Buddhist India. During the time that Nalanda was flourishing, India was invaded by many armies.

During their occupation, they have burned down this university including a nine storey library. Without realising their value, they destroyed all the books. The ruins of this library and university can still be seen today.

Nalanda university was not the only Buddhist seat of learning that was destroyed at that time. At Sarnath, Benares, there was a Buddhist monastery built to commemorate the place where the Buddha delivered his first sermon. This monastery was burned together with 1,000 monks. The ruins of the monastery can still be seen today. Other well-known Buddhist centres of learning that were destroyed in a similar manner were Taxila, Vikramasila and Jagaddala. The

events that led to the destruction of these Buddhist institutes of learning were sad, painful; they show us how narrow minded the people were at that time.

The damages to Buddhism have been done. However, as long as the people follow the Buddha's advice, his teaching or Dharma will continue to exist in the minds of the people. The Buddha's teachings can survive even if the images, pagodas, monasteries and books are destroyed. The material side of Buddhism can always be reconstructed for so long as the teachings are still within the minds of the people.

A life so beautiful, a heart so pure and kind, a mind so deep and enlightened, a personality so inspiring and selfless – such a life, such a heart, such a mind, such a personality cannot be forgotten so easily. The Buddha is the highest perfection of mankind and the flower of humanity.

A question can be raised: "Why dig out the past history to find all the damages done to Buddhism by other religionists?" The unfortunate incidents are pointed out, not to arouse the feelings of our Buddhist community, not to teach our Buddhist community to hate the other religionists who have done such damages, not to ill-treat the other religionists but to teach the public the lesson from the past: to warn the public not to repeat such inhuman, hostile attitudes to others in the future. Vast Buddhist cultures with their art, literature, holy people, places of worship, religious symbols and other institutions have done much to enlighten and to culture mankind. The educated and understanding fellow religionists also condemned that type of brutality and devastation committed by people of the same religion. The understanding people can see that those foolish people have barbaric acts due to their ignorance; the foolish ones have not learned either to value or to appreciate the other man's culture and religion. Not only they destroyed valuable religious institutions but they also have disgraced the human civilization and have abused their own religions.

This is the lesson we can learn after we study and consider the history of religious warfare and brutality: religious intolerance must be avoided, otherwise the future generation will curse those who have destroyed such invaluable human treasure.

At the same time, our Buddhist community also must understand how to organize their activities, rites and rituals and ceremonies in such a manner that they do not become a public nuisance and mockery in the eyes of the educated people. Suitable organization of religion is especially important in any multi-religious country.

DETERIORATION OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA

Another question can be raised. If Buddhists were innocent people and the Buddhist way of life helps to uplift mankind, why then do others want to destroy Buddhism and its followers? The answer is simple: others could not tolerate when they found that the Buddha's way of teaching obstructed their way of practising religion. Remember that many people in India at that time lived on

religious beliefs and practices performed in the name of religions. Certain power-hungry kings and politicians were not very happy about the vast influence that Buddhism had on the masses. Also certain religious teachers and scholars in India were not happy to see the progress of Buddhism since many of the philosophical aspects of the teaching contradicted their own philosophies. Buddhism did not depend on the concepts of God, soul and prayers and animal sacrifices. Buddhism preached the voidness of this world. So when such politicians and scholars came into their spheres of powers, it is natural that they could never tolerate the Buddhist way of life. Brahmins opposed Buddhism and called Buddhists 'heretics' and rebels against the established faith.

In certain cases not only the Brahmin's hostile attitude to Buddhism, but also their fraternal embracing of Buddhism had become the cause of the downfall of Buddhism in India. Because by embracing Buddhism in that manner, they have absorbed Buddhism into their same old faith and the name of Buddhism disappeared.

Although Brahmanism has absorbed Buddhism into that faith by introducing the Buddha as an incarnation of their God, certain Brahmins were not in favour of that idea and introduced Buddhism as a trick to mislead the demons. However; the modern Hindu intellectuals regarded the Buddha as the reformer of modern Hinduism. It is only very recently many other scholars have realised the real greatness of the Buddha after doing some comparative studies and research work on Indian philosophies. They also have realised that India is respected by the whole world today just because India has produced such a great religious teacher who is honoured by every thinking man. Today the Indians are proud of Him and speak about their heritage of Buddhist culture.

Mr. Nehru says in his *Discovery of India*: "Brahmanism and Buddhism acted and reacted on each other, and in spite of their dialectical conflicts or because of them, approached nearer to each other, both in the realm of philosophy and that of popular belief. The Mahayana especially approached the Brahminical systems and forms. It was prepared to compromise with almost anything, so long as its ethical background remained. Brahminism made Buddha an *avatar*, a God. So did Buddhism. The Mahayana doctrine spread rapidly but it lost in quality and distinctiveness what it gained in extent. The monasteries became rich, centres of vested interests, and their discipline became lax. Magic and superstition crept into the popular forms of worship. There was a progressive degeneration of Buddhism in India after the first millenium of its existence. Mrs. Rhys Davids points out its diseased state during that period: "Under the overpowering influence of these sickly imaginations the moral teachings of Gautama have been almost hidden from view. The theories grew and flourished, each new step, each new hypothesis demanded another; until the whole sky was filled with forgeries of the brain, and the nobler and simpler lessons of the founder of the religion were smothered beneath the glittering mass of metaphysical subtleties."

Francis Story says: "it is a falsification to say that Buddhism is merely a branch of Hinduism. It has many points in common with Hinduism, but it actually pre-dated what we now call Hinduism. At the time of Buddha, 2,500 years ago, the sages of India were followers of Vedic Brahmanism, while modern Hinduism is actually the

result of the impact of Mahayana Buddhist thought on the Vedic tradition. It was only when this occurred that the Hindu pantheon as we know it came into being. Historically, therefore the Buddha was never a Hindu. Philosophically, he developed a doctrine that in many ways contradicts the theistic premises of Brahminism, and is very remote indeed from the structure which pantheistic Hinduism raised." *Mr. Nehru* says, in his *'Discovery of India'*: "Buddhism is not Hinduism."

Maha Pandit Rahula Sanskritayana, another eminent Buddhist scholar says: During the reign of the Sungas, by imperial patronage, Brahmanism revived with a militant spirit. The horse-sacrifice, which was abandoned a few centuries before, was again revived and the Preceptor of the first Sunga emperor Pushyamitra, the great Grammarian Patanjali, became a most powerful and famous personality. It was at this time that the Brahmins began to revive the classical Sanskrit and its literature by composing such works as *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Manusmrti*, though only the oldest part of them, belongs to that period; the other part being added afterwards.

INTERNAL SOURCE OF CORRUPTION

When we consider the downfall of Buddhism in particular countries at particular periods of time, we must not give all the responsibility for the destruction to other religionists and to forces outside of Buddhism. We must consider that our own monks and lay followers of Buddhism were also responsible to a certain extent for that deterioration.

First we must consider that the monks and devotees had lost their devotion and inner perfection; next they lost their real knowledge of the Dharma taught by the Buddha. After losing the real Dharma knowledge many distortions have taken place and the monks could not convince the masses. Then the masses lost their confidence in them. After that, in order to continue the religion in some form or other, they introduced various practices such as magic charms, withcraft, sooth sayings, and so-called black magic. They introduced unnecessary rites and rituals which had no real religious value. With these kind of practices, they could manage to get an income for their livelihood. Then they gradually began to pay more attention towards the material gain and worldly things. They have slowly drifted far away from the spiritual way of life and finally the real spirit of Buddhism disappeared from many parts of the world.

Lao Tse is right in his saying that, when the way (of natural harmony) is lost then arises virtue; after virtue is lost then arises justice, after justice is lost then arises ritualism. Some Buddhist monks also slowly adopted the method similar to what Brahmins had been doing as religious duties which were condemned by the Buddha.

Francis Story says: "But it was not until the introduction of Tantricism, which must have been roughly coincidental with the Puranic era, or a little before it, that essential changes took place in what was currently accepted as Buddhism. The sex-magic or Tantra bridged the gulf between Buddhism and Hinduism, to the

advantage of neither. It was the general breakdown of moral standards resulting from it which gave justification for the resurgence of Brahmanism. The Brahmins found in it an excuse to attack Buddhism on the ground that the Buddhist disregard of caste had contributed towards the social anarchy that followed in the wake of Tantricism, citing the association with 'low-caste' women that the rites of Tantra required, as being one of the chief causes of the disintegration. The success of Sankaracariya's campaign against Buddhism came largely from the fact that it was not entirely unwarranted. Buddhism in India had fallen from its high estate – not for the reasons the Brahmins adduced, but from the process of popularisation, which had driven a chasm between the lofty truth proclaimed by the Buddha and the interpretation given to it by those whose understanding was on a level with their lusts. The injustice of the Brahminical charges, however, lay in the fact that the origins of Tantra were not in Buddhism at all, but in the phallic cult which had corrupted it from without. By absorbing these influences Buddhism in India had taken the wrong turning. From that time up to the present day only the memory of the Buddha was preserved in India.

However, the basic teachings of the Buddha were not completely eradicated from the world. Those original teachings had been written down in Ceylon in the Pali language 500 years after the Buddha before such distortion took place. And also the translations of the original *Mahayana Sutras* can be found in Chinese and Tibetan languages.

IMPERMANENCY

Great nations, kingdoms and empires have been founded, flourished for sometime and disappeared altogether. New government comes into power and another party topples that government and form another government. One religion reigns supreme for sometime and another religion becomes more popular and attracts more people into their fold. One civilisation exists for a certain period and disappears. Certain traditions, customs, manners and way of life prevail for sometime and are subsequently replaced by other forms. Mighty palaces, cities, huge buildings and big institutions are built and lost in the dust. Planets and stars exist in space and disappear after a period, and so will the whole universe.

Since everything is impermanent in this universe, we must understand the real nature of this transitoriness.

Although religions are trying to explain the nature of the universal law and pave the way for man's happiness, yet religion itself is not free from this impermanency. If any religion teaches us that there is such everlasting religion in this world, then that teaching is going against the Universal Law – that everything is impermanent.

The Buddha has said that Buddhas and other religious teachers will appear from time to time and disappear. Their teachings will remain in this world for sometime and will also be forgotten. It will take a long time for another religious teacher to appear in this world to remove the darkness of ignorance from the minds of the people to understand this universal law.

May the darkness of ignorance which prevails in the man's mind be dispelled from his mind and may he find real truth through a rational religion to gain religious harmony, peace, happiness for the well being of mankind.

May they cultivate real religious tolerance to eradicate fear, suspicion and insecurity from the man's mind, by sincerely following their respective religions.