

# Buddhism

Christmas Humphreys





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## BUDDHISM

Christmas Humphreys, born in London in 1901, is the descendant of a line of lawyers. He was called to the Bar on leaving Cambridge, and in due course became Senior Prosecuting Counsel at the Old Bailey, like his father before him. He is now a Commissioner of the Central Criminal Court. He sits as Recorder of Guildford and Deputy Chairman of Kent Quarter Sessions.

Interested in Buddhism at an early age, in 1924 he founded the Buddhist Society, London, which is now the oldest and largest Buddhist organization in Europe. As publisher to the Society, he has been responsible for its wide range of publications, including six of his own. His interest is in world Buddhism as distinct from any of its various Schools, and he believes that only in a combination of all Schools can the full grandeur of Buddhist thought be found. In 1945 he expressed the consensus of such doctrines in the now famous 'Twelve Principles of Buddhism' which, already translated into fourteen languages, are in process of being accepted as the basis of world Buddhism. In 1962 he was made Vice-President of the Tibet Society, and Joint Vice-Chairman of the Royal India, Pakistan and Ceylon Society.

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# BUDDHISM

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CHRISTMAS HUMPHREYS



PENGUIN BOOKS

**Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England**  
**Penguin Books Inc., 7110 Ambassador Road, Baltimore, Maryland 21207, U.S.A.**  
**Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia**

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**First published 1951**  
**Reprinted 1952, 1954**  
**Second Edition 1955**  
**Reprinted 1958**  
**Third Edition 1962**  
**Reprinted 1964, 1967 (twice), 1969, 1971, 1972, 1974**

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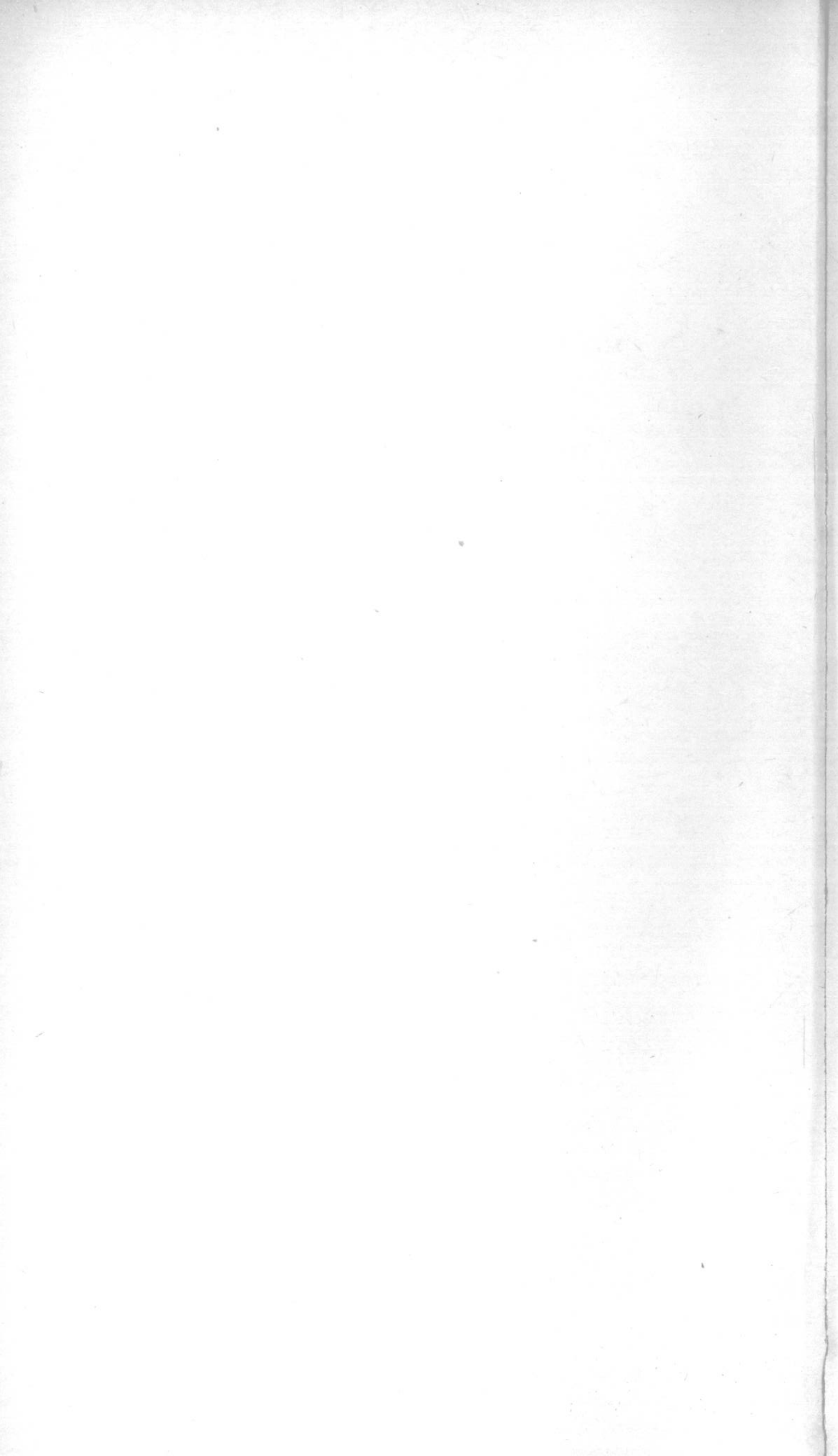
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TO  
THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY, LONDON  
ON THE OCCASION OF ITS  
SILVER JUBILEE  
19 NOVEMBER  
1949



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## Preface

THE ideal author of this work would have a considerable knowledge of each part of the subject, be impartial in respect of all of them, and be able to see and to present the vast system as an integrated whole. No such person exists. There are experts in Theravada or Southern Buddhism; in the Mahayana or Northern Buddhism; in Tibetan Buddhism; on Buddhist Art and on Zen. But these are scholars working for the most part each in a limited sphere, and few if any of them know the condition of Buddhism in the world to-day. To compress the essence of all these subjects, in their due proportion, into a volume of this size is a bold ideal and a consummation easy to be missed.

My own qualifications are few. I have no knowledge of oriental languages, and therefore rely upon translations, yet as I belong to no one School of Buddhism I can study the whole dispassionately, and have done so for some thirty years. Of Buddhism in the world to-day I know more than most, and of Buddhism in the West as much as any man, having been the active President of the Buddhist Society, London, from its foundation in 1924.

Of these qualifications the practical experience is paramount. Any writer who studied the books in the Bibliography could tell of the bones of Buddhism; only a Buddhist can reveal its life. As Dr J. B. Pratt says in his Preface to *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism*: 'To give the feeling of an alien religion it is necessary to do more than expound its concepts and describe its history. One must catch its emotional undertone, enter sympathetically into its sentiments, feel one's way into its symbols, its cult, its art, and then seek to impart these things not merely by scientific exposition but in all sorts of indirect ways.' This is true, and a book on Buddhism should be subject to this test. Not that Buddhism is an emotional religion. Indeed, by the usual tests, it is not a religion so much as a spiritual philosophy whose attitude to life is as cool and objective as that of the modern scientist. But it lives, it lives tremendously, and is not, as the West is apt to regard it as, a museum specimen. To the hundreds of millions who are joyously treading to-day the Eightfold Way to Enlightenment it is the essence of life itself, and only by living it

can its truths be known. He who writes of it, therefore, should have studied its principles and have loved and lived them too.

No attempt has been made to place Buddhism in the field of comparative religion, for if all comparisons are odious those between religions cause the greatest odium. Here is Buddhism; let those who wish to compare it with anything else make their own comparison.

I am grateful to those who have helped me so generously. To Miss I. B. Horner, Hon. Secretary of the Pali Text Society, who has read the chapters on the Theravada and made innumerable suggestions; to Dr E. J. Thomas of Cambridge, who has done the same for the chapters on the Mahayana; to the Bhikkhu U Thittila who checked what I had to say on the Sangha, and as Librarian of the Buddhist Society, London, helped me to make the best use of its Library; to Dr Reginald Le May who checked my chapter on Buddhist Art; to Mr R. E. W. Iggleden for help with the Mahayana Canon, and to Mr R. J. Jackson, who became a practising Buddhist in 1905, for checking my account of the Buddhist movement in England. Yet, though I have the approval of these and other scholars for most of my facts, the responsibility for their collation and my views upon them is entirely my own.

The illustrations were difficult to choose, and have been collected from all over the world. Many of the photographs are my own; others were taken by Mr Frederick Page of objects or photographs in my own or in the Buddhist Society's collection. For the Chinese Kwan-Yin I must thank Sir Geoffrey and Lady Burton. Mr C. Jinarajadasa, President of the Theosophical Society, sent me the photograph of Colonel Olcott; Miss Constant Lounsbery and Mme David-Neel provided their own at my request, and the snapshot of the Bhikkhu U Thittila and myself was taken in my London garden by Mr Colin Wyatt.

Some of these chapters have appeared in whole or in part in various periodicals, and I am grateful to the Editors of the *Aquarian Path*, the *Aryan Path*, the *Hibbert Journal*, *Rider's Review* and the *Theosophist* for permission to reproduce the parts already published.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to Miss Amy Bedwell and Miss Angela Clare for their patient typing, and to my wife for her magnificent support of an author attempting the impossible.

*St John's Wood, 19 November 1949*

T. C. H.

## *Introduction*

WHAT IS BUDDHISM? In one sense it is man's understanding of the Teaching of Gautama, the Buddha; in another it is the religion-philosophy which has grown about that Teaching. To describe it is as difficult as describing London. Is it Mayfair, Bloomsbury, or the Old Kent Road? Or is it the lowest common multiple of all these parts, or all of them and something more? In the *Udana*, one of the Scriptures of the Theravada or Hinayana School of Buddhism, is recorded the parable of the Elephant. A number of wandering philosophers living near the Buddha had become noisy about their several views, and some of the Buddhist Bhikkhus, or members of the Order, described their behaviour to the All-Enlightened One. He listened and then gave them the parable. In former times a Raja sent for all the blind men in his capital and placed an elephant in their midst. One man felt the head of the elephant, another an ear, another a tusk, another the tuft of its tail. Asked to describe the elephant, one said that an elephant was a large pot, others that it was a winnowing fan, a ploughshare, or a besom. Thus each described the elephant as the part which he first touched, and the Raja was consumed with merriment. 'Thus', said the Buddha, 'are those wanderers who, blind, unseeing, knowing not the truth, yet each maintain that it is thus and thus.'

Buddhism is in fact a family of religions and philosophies, but which of its parts is 'right' or 'original' is opinion added to objective fact. The Buddha himself wrote nothing, and none of his Teaching was written down for at least four hundred years after his death. We therefore do not know what the Buddha taught, any more than we know what Jesus taught; and to-day at least four Schools, with sub-divisions in each, proclaim their own view as to what is Buddhism. The oldest and probably nearest to the original teaching is the Theravada (the Doctrine of the Elders), and this to-day is the religion of Ceylon, Burma, Siam, and Cambodia. The Mahayana (large Vehicle) includes the rest of the Buddhist world. But the peculiarities of Tibetan Buddhism, which covers Tibet and its neighbours, Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal, are so



marked that though it is part of the Mahayana it may be considered a School on its own, and the same applies to the Zen School of Japan, which is utterly different from any other School of Buddhism or from any other religion-philosophy.

The range of Buddhism is enormous. In time it covers 2,500 years; in space it covers the Theravada countries already described, the Mahayana countries of Tibet and its neighbours, and Mongolia, China, Korea and Japan, though China is not, in the sense that the others are, a Buddhist country. Buddhism is therefore to be found to the North, East and South of its parent country, India, while in the West its influence, first felt in Roman times, is growing rapidly to-day.

Its range of subject is no less vast, and it is in fact the most comprehensive and profound school of spiritual achievement known to history. Those who consider it simple, or to be expressed in a few brief words, have never studied it. In its earliest form it included the finest moral philosophy then known to man, with a range of mind-development and pioneer psychology second to none. In its developed form it includes religion, advanced philosophy, mysticism, metaphysics, psychology, magic and ritual; the triple Yoga of India – intellectual, devotional, and the way of action – and its own unique contribution to human achievement, Zen. In every country it raised the indigenous culture, and in China and Japan produced the greatest art of each country. Indeed, the art of the T'ang Dynasty of China, often described as the finest in the world, was largely Buddhist art, while throughout the East it has set such a standard of tolerance, gentleness, and a love of nature and the lower forms of life, that in religious history, where these virtues have not been prominent, it stands supreme.

The field of Buddhism may be considered in three concentric circles; the original Message, its development, and additions to it. Considering first the additions, all arise from the excess of tolerance which Buddhism displayed from the first. As it gently flowed into country after country, whether of a higher or lower culture than its own, it tended to adopt, or failed to contest the rival claims of, the indigenous beliefs, however crude. In this way the most divers and debased beliefs were added to the corpus of 'Buddhism', and embarrass



the student to-day. Thus in Ceylon, Burma and Siam the worship of nature-spirits continues side by side with the later teaching, while in China and Japan the Confucian, Taoist and Shinto beliefs have modified the entering stream of Buddhism. Still more has the indigenous Bön religion of Tibet corrupted Tibetan Buddhism, itself already mixed with Hindu Tantric practices.

Several of the additions, however, came from internal weakness, and might be described as degenerations as distinct from developments. Thus the excessive worship of the written word, so striking a feature of Buddhism in Ceylon, as also the 'popular' form of Shin Buddhism in Japan, whereby the formal repetition of an act of faith suffices for personal redemption, are alike quite alien to the spirit of the earlier School.

A third type of addition comes from later grafting, such as the Tantric ingredients in the Mahayana Buddhism which entered Tibet in the seventh century, and the development of a priestcraft which claims to be essential to the layman's spiritual life.

It is far more difficult to distinguish between the Message and its development, for such a distinction implies a measure of certainty as to the Message. But what are the authorities by which to judge? The first, of course, is the Pali Canon of the Southern or Theravada School, but how much of this is in the form in which it was written down in the first century B.C., and how much of that was a fair rendering of the Master's words? These are matters on which no scholar would dare to dogmatize. Yet the pioneer work of the late Mrs Rhys Davids, who submitted the Pali Canon to a 'higher criticism', has made it clear that the Buddha's original message to mankind was cast in positive form. The positive Mandate recoverable in fragments from the somewhat emasculated and negative remainder shows, as common sense would expect, that his Teaching was a call to the More of life, not to the ending of it, and not to the running away from a relative and imperfect world. The ephemeral self must die, so much is clear; but what shall attain salvation, become enlightened, reach Nirvana, when this unreal, separative, misery-causing self is dead? The answer is man.

What else exists in the way of 'authority'? Some of the

Chinese Agamas are translations of Sanskrit works as old as much of the Pali Canon, but the Sutras of the Mahayana School, though put into the Buddha's mouth, are clearly the work of minds which lived from three to seven hundred years after his passing. There remains the esoteric tradition, none the less potent, none the less reliable for the fact that it is nowhere, in more than fragments, written down. The Theravada, the Southern School of the Pali Canon, ignores the story in the *Samyutta Nikaya* of the simsapa leaves. Which were the more numerous, the Buddha asked his disciples, taking a handful of leaves from the forest floor, the leaves in his hand or those in the forest about him? The reply being given, he explained that such was the relation of the truths which he had revealed to those which he knew but had not revealed. Of all his knowledge he taught, he said, only those things which conduced to the holy life, to peace of mind, to the finding of Nirvana. Ignoring this, the Theravadins cling to a single phrase in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, to the effect that the Buddha was not one who had the closed fist of a teacher who kept some things back, an obvious reference to his major task on earth, to make available to all mankind the principles of the Wisdom which the Brahmans had hitherto preserved as their tight monopoly.

The Mahayana School has no such doubts or differences. All its sects admit the distinction between truths available to all and those power-producing secrets which are taught only by word of mouth from *guru* to *chelas* as the latter prove, by their moral character, worthy to be given them. The mathematician who lectured a class of children on the Integral Calculus would be a fool; in matters of spiritual knowledge the last word lies with the *Tao Te Ching*: 'He who speaks does not know; he who knows does not speak.'

In fact, the search for Buddhist authority is always vain. 'Do not go by hearsay', said the Buddha in his famous advice to the Kalamas, 'nor by what is handed down by others, nor by what is stated on the authority of your traditional teachings. Do not go by reasons, nor by inference, nor by arguments as to method, nor by reflection on and approval of an opinion, nor out of respect, thinking a recluse must be deferred to . . .' What, then, is the test? The Sutta quoted, like most of the Pali Canon, first gives the answer negatively. 'When these teachings, followed out and put into practice,

conduce to loss and suffering – then reject them.’<sup>1</sup> Or, in modern parlance, see if they work; if so, accept them.

In the absence of authority there are three ways to decide what is Buddhism. The first is eclectic, whereby the individual selects those portions of the Teaching which suit his immediate needs and makes them his own. A second and more satisfactory method is to find by elaborate study the common ground between the multiple Schools and sects and to express the result in general principles. A far more difficult method, and that which I have humbly attempted here, is to take the whole field of Buddhism for study, and then to distil, with the aid of intuitive thought and much meditation, a picture, however incomplete, of *Buddhism*, as distinct from any one School or part of it. This implies, it is true, a personal Buddhism, in the sense of a personal understanding of Buddhism. Why not? Buddhism, like any other form of relative truth, must vary with the individual, and grow for him with his individual growth. Only the Buddha fully understood ‘Buddhism’!

Such study shows that Buddhism may be compared to a net, a net of principles, life-tendencies, knots in the flow of life, vortices of force called matter. For life is motion and life is one. Pick up a knot of the net, therefore, and the rest of the net comes with it. One’s choice of eternal principles for a brief yet sweeping survey of the field of Buddhism is a choice among these ‘ganglia’. When I essayed this method seven Principles emerged. The first three, as I noticed, having chosen them, were universal in scope. The second three applied to the individual man, and the seventh enclosed the six in the circle of unity. In these, I believe, all Buddhism is somewhere to be found, for a symbol, if it be true, can be read on many planes – ‘the casket of Truth has seven keys’. Yet this is at best a tentative chart to the ocean of Buddhism; only the study of many a book and profound meditation on every part of it will provide the flavour of a single drop.

### 1. *The Buddha’s Enlightenment*

The Buddha was the Buddha because he was *Buddha*, Awakened, Enlightened, made Aware. *Bodhi*, Wisdom, acquired by the faculty of *Buddhi*, the intuition, the power of direct dynamic spiritual awareness, has many names and

1. From Woodward, *Some Sayings of the Buddha*, p. 283.



many degrees of achievement. *Satori*, the spiritual experience of Zen Buddhism, and *Samadhi*, the last step on the Noble Eightfold Path, are steps on the way to it; Nirvana (Pali: *Nibbana*) is its human goal. Yet beyond lies Parinirvana, for Buddhism is a process of becoming, and admits no conceivable end.

The Buddha's Enlightenment is therefore the womb, the heart and *raison d'être* of Buddhism. It is the criterion of all Buddhist teaching that it conduces or does not conduce to the achievement of Enlightenment. Bodhi, the *Maha Bodhi* or supreme Wisdom, is the purpose of all study, of all morality, of all attempts at self-development. It is for this that the false and separative self is slain and the true Self steadily developed; it is the sole end of all progress on the Eightfold Path; it is the *Buddh* in Buddhism.

There are infinite degrees in this development, from a 'bright idea' when a faculty greater than reasoning breaks through into the cage of a concept-ridden mind, to Parinirvana – and Beyond. The Buddha achieved (and hence his title) supreme Enlightenment, yet his victory was not unique. Buddhas before him had opened the Thousand-petalled Lotus to its perfect flowering; there are Buddhas to come. In the end each living thing will achieve Enlightenment. It is therefore the hope and the promise of Buddhism, and all study and attempted practice which loses sight of this ultimate, supreme experience may be useful, but is not Buddhism.

## 2. Mind-Only

In the beginning is the One, and only the One *is*. From the One comes Two, the innumerable Pairs of Opposites. But there is no such thing as two, for no two things can be conceived without their relationship, and this makes Three, the basic Trinity of all manifestation. From the three (or its six permutations and integrating seventh) come the manifold things of 'usual life' which the Chinese call the Ten Thousand Things. These are unreal in a world of unreality, comparatively real in a world of comparative reality, Real in that each is part of an ultimate, unmanifest Reality. As Reality must be, if anything is, supremely Enlightened, this faculty of supreme Enlightenment informs all things, though none of them owns it. It alone is Real.

From the viewpoint of the centre all phenomena or things