

Exploring Buddhism



Christina Humphreys

EXPLORING BUDDHISM

The Buddhist field of knowledge is now so vast that few can master all of it, and the study and application of its principles must be a matter of choice.

One may choose the magnificent moral philosophy of Theravada, the oldest school, or the Zen training of Japan; or special themes such as the doctrine of No-self, the Mahayana emphasis on compassion or the universal law of Karma and Rebirth. But the intense self-discipline needed for true spiritual experience calls for specialisation of subject and technique.

In his latest work Christmas Humphreys, the well-known author of a dozen books on Buddhism (including such popular volumes as *Buddhism*, *The Buddhist Way of Life*, *Zen Buddhism* and *A Western Approach to Zen*) describes his exploration in some 20 of these subjects, which together form a valuable addition to Western Buddhist literature. Some of these chapters deal with ideas not hitherto expressed—but, as the author points out, all experience is purely personal and therefore fresh to the reader's mind.

This is a book for all in the West who are finding in Buddhism a tested system of truth which accords with the highest discoveries of science and psychology and also with the deepest nature of man.

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CHRISTMAS HUMPHREYS



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Introduction

In the course of centuries the Buddhist field has become so vast that it is difficult to write about *all* of it. Few indeed have attempted to do so, and the number of books which even include all its schools and wanderings is remarkably small. By now the word Buddhist has come to bear two very different meanings: (1) Buddhist scholars, learned men and women who choose some corner of the field and add to our knowledge of it. They are trained to write objectively, and few would even admit to being Buddhists in the second meaning of the term. (2) This includes students who attempt to obtain confirmation of doctrine by diving into their own minds and by applying the principles examined in their own lives. For want of a better term one may call them practitioners. But no one attempting to practise Buddhism can operate in the entire field. There must be, as with scholars, specialization, concentration on a chosen area. One may, for example, practise the basic teachings of the Theravada, which is the Buddhism of Ceylon, Burma and Thailand, and generally accepted as the oldest Buddhist school extant; or one may attempt the Zen training open to Westerners in Japan; or one may try the still harder practice of Tibetan Buddhism, but one cannot seriously practise all three at once. The intensive self-discipline needed for acquiring real spiritual experience calls for specialization before theory can be developed into actual awareness. Whether the specialized target be a theme, such as No-self or the Void, or Karma and Rebirth, or as wide as a school with its own special 'way', the studies must be in depth.

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For myself, in half a century of exploration in the spiritual continent of Buddhism I have, conditioned by my own past lives and self-training in this one, made intensive expeditions into the theory and the practice of selected corners of the field. Herein are accounts of such explorings. This is not, therefore, another textbook of Buddhism, and large areas of that field are scarcely mentioned. In the subjects chosen there are, of course, repetitions, for the same features, as of landscape, appear again and again. And in describing these adventures my own equipment—one might almost call it an intellectual pharmacopoeia—of quotations and the like may well be repeated.

Per contra, there may be seeming contradictions, for there are, as scholars and practitioners alike will agree, considerable areas of Buddhism where conflicting views are strongly held, and in the tolerant atmosphere of Buddhism frankly compared and discussed. For example, the Anatta doctrine of the Theravada school as still taught in parts of it today is, some hold, the heart of Buddhism or, as others argue, demonstrably untrue. Again, the Tantras of Tibet are basic Tibetan Buddhism or a totally unBuddhist importation from India. Or Shin Buddhism, most popular in Japan, is either a legitimate complement to Zen Buddhism, or so widely at variance with the spirit of Buddhism as a whole that it should be excluded from the ambit of that term. So views can differ widely on the legitimate purpose and value of meditation, on the need for a branch of the Theravada Sangha in the West, or on the relation of Buddhist philosophy to modern physics.

What, then, in this work is original? In one sense nothing and in another sense all. Doctrine may be flogged to a standstill, but all experience is entirely personal, and fresh for the individual each time that timeless moment arrives. Buddhism knows no authority save that of the intuition and every step on the Way must be trodden by the seeker until intensive personal knowledge ratifies its truth.

My explorations have at times been in areas trodden flat,

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one might say, by two thousand years of experience and description, yet always the approach is new. These might include the chapters on Anatta, Karma and Rebirth, and Concentration and Meditation. Yet no two explorers approach their subject in quite the same way, nor achieve precisely the same understanding.

In other subjects, such as that of the 'Wisdom that has gone Beyond', the field is less well trodden, and it is all too easy to lose one's way, while if the two concentric circles of Tibetan Buddhism as described in Chapter 3 have been so described elsewhere I have never read such a description.

Here then is food for different types and states of mind, some items rescued from the silence of back volumes of magazines, some built up from unfinished articles, some new. May some of them at least be of service to all who seek the Beyond of gross materialism, and in some corner of that 'accumulated Wisdom of the ages' which is the noblest asset of the human mind find, albeit for the first time, unforgettable moments of pure Truth.

Part One

**THE BUDDHA AND HIS
ENLIGHTENMENT**

I

The Buddha's Enlightenment

The Buddha was a man, by name Gautama Siddhartha, but his place in the spiritual history of mankind is shown by the title which he earned and by which he is known to the world. He became, by effort intensely applied for countless incarnations, Buddha, the Enlightened One, or Sambuddha, the Self-Enlightened One. In the esoteric tradition there are grades of spiritual achievement, and a hierarchy of those who on earth have attained liberation from the Wheel of Becoming. These self-perfected men, pilgrims who have reached the Goal of Nirvana, are known to mankind by many names; Buddhists call them Arhats and Bodhisattvas. But whether described as Rishis, Mahatmas, the Brothers, the Masters, or by their Buddhist names, their spiritual status is inconceivably higher than our own; yet they, according to the timeless and unwritten records of the East, acknowledge the Buddha as 'the Patron of the Adepts', their Master and Lord.

What, then, should be our wonder and humility of mind in the presence of such men made perfect, and even more so in the aura of the Sambuddha, Lord of them all? We must use imagination to bridge the gap that separates their vast achievement from our own. Think of an all-wise friend, with the largest mind, the deepest heart of understanding, the widest vision of the world and the cosmic processes of world-and-man-becoming. There are such men in the world of men, though the greatest of them are rarely seen. If they are not met their words are known in writings or recorded speech, and our

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little minds can enter the glory of their minds by such an entrance.

Now think of a mind so purified, expanded, and uplifted in its range of vision, and realize that such a man is at most the *chela* or disciple of one of the Great Ones still in a physical body on earth. As such he is still far from the spiritual grandeur which they have achieved. And these Great Ones call the Buddha Master.

Such men, in high or low degree, are living expressions of Love and Wisdom, and the whole range of noble attributes with which we adorn those pilgrims of the Way who have reached the further shore. Theirs is the vision of the Whole, achieved by countless lives of right effort in the elimination of self and the expansion of the selfless Self which moves to Enlightenment. In the course of that journey they suffered torments which we cannot yet conceive in tearing the weed of self from the heart of selfishness, yet, finally, in each, and supremely in the case of Gautama Siddhartha, the self died before Self. The Christ-Buddha-principle broke free of the limitations of the personality, and the 'Thousand-petalled-Lotus' was unfolded utterly. Thereafter the gates of Nirvana were opened for one who had earned the right of entry—and entry was rejected. The supreme sacrifice was made in the full awareness of its implications, and the reward of a thousand lives of vast endeavour was laid aside for the unending task of enlightening mankind.

The Buddha returned to the world of men to teach—Awakening. Buddhas are awakeners, rousing every man who has ears to hear to rise from the sloth of illusion and tread the Way to his own enlightenment. Lack of awakening is the origin of Ill, the cause of suffering, and the only Buddhist sin is that of *a-vidya*, absence of vision, ignorance. The Vidya to be gained is a new dimension of consciousness, an awareness, in the words of the *Dhammapada*, of 'Self as the lord of self'. The Buddha pointed a Way, and about it on either side have grown up the Schools and sects of what in the West we know

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as Buddhism. But, as Dr D. T. Suzuki says, 'the life of Buddhism is the unfolding of the inner spiritual life of the Buddha himself, rather than his exposition of it, recorded as the Dharma in Buddhist literature'.¹ Thus Buddhism, as he elsewhere says, is the life-force which carries forward a spiritual movement called Buddhism. It is therefore strange that Buddhist scholars, in all parts of the world, are so engrossed in the so-called teachings of the Buddha that they neglect the study of the spiritual experience which gave rise to that Teaching. Buddhism is a record of Enlightenment and the Way that leads to it; it is the shrine and should be the vehicle of his Enlightenment.

Some men heard the 'Lion's roar of Truth' when he spoke to them in the forest glades of Northern India 2500 years ago. Some men heard the Message of the Way from these, the supremely fortunate. We in the West read, in translation, what others think they understood of that long tradition, and in the silence of our meditation hear again the splendour of that Word. 'Thus have I heard . . .' murmurs the Bhikkhu as he attempts to give, in simple language, the Dhamma of the All-Enlightened One, and we who hear have the privilege, strenuously earned, to hearken and obey.

The Buddha achieved Enlightenment and taught mankind the Way. Little can usefully be said of this ultimate experience, but much may be written of the Way which leads to it. A thousand thousand men have climbed to the summit of Fujisan to see the sun rise in the distant sea; none told the same tale of the journey. So we, on the slopes of the mountain of Reality, learn of the Way from those ahead of us, and pass to our younger brothers the wisdom learned. The Way which lies within from its first beginning to its unknown end is, like all else in existence, twofold. From the negative point of view, it is destructive, for a man must clear his building-site of rubbish before he can begin to build. We must break the bonds of desire, the adhesions of ill-thought. We

¹ *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. 1st Series. 1st edn. p. 37.

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must cleanse the mind of the illusion of discrimination, the sense of separateness which leads us to imagine the existence of a permanently separate ego. At the same time, positively, we must learn to expand the Self, until this *Bodhicitta*, the Wisdom-heart within, breaks from the shell of unregenerate self and expands into Enlightenment. Does the dewdrop slip into the Shining Sea, or, as the mystics of the world have described it, is it the Shining Sea which fills the dewdrop with the Plenum-Void? It matters not, for the experience is beyond our wording.

With this expansion all else follows. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all things shall be added unto you.' He who begins to achieve enlightenment finds that the lower faculties, sworn though they are in fealty to self, change to a new obedience, and for the first time there is a total man to move to his own salvation.

Enlightenment is perfect understanding, and we can and should begin the process now. A positive effort is needed, and the way to enlightenment is to understand until it hurts. The mind must be stretched to include emotions, thoughts and points of view entirely foreign to the narrow limits of our present life. We must understand the mind of the criminal, lie down in the gutter of thought with the drunken prostitute, the debaucher of children, the scum of the earth, for we shall not rise in consciousness to the level of the saint while feeling separate from the lowest members of our family. He who can enter into the vilest corners of the human mind will purge himself of pride that he is not as other men. Then and only then may he reach for the feet of those who do not fear contamination by what to them are still his grubby hands. To expand the heart to Oneness, such is the meaning of Enlightenment, for the Buddha-Mind is one with the Universe, one with the All-Mind from which it came.

But if we cannot now be one with the great ones of our human family, we can induce, by the powerful faculty of imagination, something of the state of consciousness which

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great expansion brings. We can induce some measure of the cool serenity which comes when the conflict of the opposites, the rival claims of the two sides of the penny, have died away. When all distinctions are glimpsed as falsely imagined, and the essence of 'pennydom' is understood as beyond the use of either of its complementary sides, then something unforgettable has been achieved. The same applies to that sense of certainty, the absence of doubt and tentative experiment which must be achieved so long as we let ourselves be partial and one-sided in our views. We are certain, with a masterly touch in circumstance, or large or small, and in all action we feel some dim yet growing awareness of that rhythm of life which is the universal becoming working through its pure or impure medium, you and me.

The results of even this exercise in self-enlightening are proof that our chosen road is 'right'. Henceforth we ask ourselves, not how much time and energy should be given to the Way, but *what else matters*—save increased awakening? Does this or that lead, or does it not, to further enlightenment? This is the new criterion of action, the sole excuse and reason for anything at all. The ladders to this new state of consciousness are various. Right action is the way of Karma-Yoga; devotion to the Beloved ideal is the way of Bhakti-Yoga, of the mystic of all ages. The intellect studies the opposites, and attempts to approximate more closely every pair until it can proclaim in triumph 'Thou *art* THAT'. Only the intuition, the faculty of *Buddhi* can go further, and it goes so far that it passes beyond our intellectual ken. Here there is no distinction between this and that, nor awareness of any difference. 'Thou' and 'THAT' are no more the ultimates of the part and the whole perceived as one—the difference is extinguished. The intuition functions by direct awareness. It is therefore the faculty of Enlightenment which frees a man from the last illusion—separateness, and being freed it knows that it is free, and is of the substance of Nirvana. If this is to most of us an ideal state beyond