

# **BUDDHISM: SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION**

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**ABSTRACT:** The conception that Buddhism has of the world could be considered as the Buddhist Philosophy of Nature. This buddhist conception of the world is one of the principal links of Buddhism with science. Buddhism has a dynamic conception of reality. This manifests itself in the peculiar doctrine of the dharmas. Dharmas are the elements, the constituent factors of all that exists. Man is a conglomerate of series of dharmas. The end of desire is the suppression of existence under the form of reincarnation. This state is called Nirvana. Nirvana is an Absolute. It does not belong to our empirical reality, it is something completely different from all that exists in this reality, it is transcendent and heterogeneous, beyond words and reason. The buddhist methodology for directing the mind is pointing out freedom of thought and personal effort to attain truth. This buddhist rule enjoins an attitude based on freedom of thought. One should not adhere to an opinion by authority; it is necessary to think by oneself on any matter to reach one's own conclusions.

**KEY WORDS:** buddhism, buddhist cosmology, philosophy, religion, epistemology, ethics and truth.

## ***Budismo: ciencia, filosofía y religión***

**RESUMEN:** La concepción budista del mundo puede ser considerada como la filosofía budista de la naturaleza. Esta concepción es una de las principales conexiones del budismo con la ciencia. El budismo tiene una concepción dinámica de la realidad. Se manifiesta en la peculiar doctrina de los dharmas. Son los elementos, los factores constituyentes de todo lo que existe. El hombre es un conglomerado de series de dharmas. El fin del deseo es la supresión de la existencia por las reencarnaciones. Este estado se llama Nirvana. El Nirvana es un Absoluto. No pertenece a nuestra realidad empírica, es algo completamente diferentes de todo lo que existe en esta realidad, es transcendente y heterogéneo, más allá de las palabras y de la razón. La metodología budista para dirigir el espíritu hace resaltar la libertad de pensamiento y el esfuerzo personal para alcanzar la verdad. Esta regla budista supone una actitud fundada en la libertad de pensamiento. No se debería aceptar una opinión por autoridad; es necesario pensar por uno mismo sobre cualquier cuestión para alcanzar las propias conclusiones.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** budismo, cosmología, filosofía, religión, epistemología, ética, y verdad budistas.

Buddhism has its own conceptions of the *world* as a composite whole, of *man* as a creature possessing a peculiar nature, living in this world, submitted to a destiny and having an *aim* to attain, and of the *method* or means to accomplish that human aim.

## PART I: *Buddhism and Science*

### BUDDHIST CONCEPTION OF THE WORLD

The conception that Buddhism has of the world<sup>1</sup> could be considered as the *Buddhist Philosophy of Nature*, which is the preceding stage of the *scientific study of nature*. This Buddhist conception of the world is one of the principal links of Buddhism with science.

In general terms we cannot know how this conception of the world was created, because it is directly presented in the texts, we could say, in a dogmatic way and there is scarce information about the question whether it is the result of observation and reflection or merely a product of intuition and imagination. It is not possible either to pretend to find a scientific approach in modern terms in this ancient conception of the world; anyhow this conception is most valuable taking into account the epoch in which it was proclaimed by the founder of Buddhism (*circa* 500 B.C.) and amazingly interesting because of the modernity of many of its tenets.

We shall point out the principal elements of the Buddhist conception of the world.

### BEGINNINGLESSNESS

Beginninglessness (*anāditva*) is one of the most important principles in Indian philosophy, Hindu as well as Buddhist. It asserts the lack of beginning for a series of entities, processes, phenomena, etc.<sup>2</sup> This conception of Indian philosophy contrasts in a very remarkable way with the more generalized conception in Western philosophy, always anxious to find for every thing a First Cause, a First Motor, a First Principle, that marks a beginning, beyond which it is impossible to go further.

Buddhism (as well as Hinduism) maintains that the empirical reality, with its worlds, universes, men, the transient Gods, etc., the processes that take place in it and the laws that govern it, has had no temporal beginning, is eternal *a parte ante*.

There are many Buddhist texts, which affirm that the *saṃsāra*, whose original meaning is «transmigration», «reincarnations», has no beginning nor end. In many of them the word *saṃsāra* has a broader sense: it designates the whole reality, i.e. this empirical world as well as the other world (heavens, hells, worlds of the Gods, etc.). The processes that constitute transmigration take place in this whole reality, consequently, as transmigration is beginningless, so the reality

<sup>1</sup> Cf. AKIRA SADAKATA, *Buddhist Cosmology* (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI (1980), «*Anāditva* or Beginninglessness in Indian Philosophy», pp. 1-20, and (1983).

where they occur is also beginningless. Moreover, as Buddhism does not accept the existence of a Supreme Being, creator of the universe, this has not been created, it is beginningless.

In *Samyutta Nikāya* II, pp. 178-181, Buddha declares:

«The saṃsāra, O monks, is without limit. A first extreme [of the series] of the beings cloaked in ignorance, tied to craving, that are running on (in the saṃsāra), that are transmigrating, is not known».

In *Madhyamakaśāstra* XI, verse 1, Nāgārjuna says:

«The Great Sage has said that a first extreme is not known, for saṃsāra is without beginning and end - it has neither beginning nor end».

#### INFINITUDE OF THE SPACE

To the eternity that Buddhism attributes to the empirical reality corresponds the infinity of space. The empirical reality extends in an unlimited way in the ten directions of the space.

The stanza I, 64 of *Buddhavaṃsa* affirms that four things are beyond any measure:

«... the mass of beings, the space, the worlds..., the knowledge of a Buddha...».

A passage of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Chapter XI, p. 240, lines 12-13 (= p. 268 in F. Tola y C. Dragonetti's Spanish translation from Sanskrit), describes in an impressive way the profoundness of the universe:

«There is, in the nadir, beyond incalculable hundreds of thousands of ten millions of hundred thousands millions of universes, a universe called *Ratnaviśuddha*».

And the great/infinite number of worlds that inhabit the space, to which we shall refer afterwards, requires an unlimited space, where these worlds can be located.

#### INFINITE NUMBER OF WORLDS

This unlimited space is occupied by millions of millions of worlds, disseminated in all the regions. Many texts refer to the infinite number of worlds that fill the space:

The (smaller) *Sukhāvātīvyūha*, p. 93, lines 1-2:

«O Śāriputra, there is in the Western region of space, from hence beyond one thousand of ten thousands of Buddha-Worlds, a Buddha-World, *Sukhāvātī* by name».

In Chapter VII of the *Lotus Sūtra* several references to the infinite number of worlds are found. So in p. 163, lines 6-7 (= p. 188 in the Spanish translation), the number of universes in each region of the space is mentioned in a general way:

*«In the ten regions of the space, in each one of them, the fifty hundreds of thousands of ten millions of hundred thousand millions of worlds in six ways trembled».*

And in the following pages (p. 167, lines 10-11; p. 171, lines 4-5; p. 174, lines 6-7 and 8) the same expression is used in order to indicate in an individual form the infinite number of universes in each region of the space. In p. 157, lines 1-2 (= p. 181 of the Spanish translation), the infinite number of the worlds is also pointed out:

*«What do you think, O Monks, is it possible to arrive through calculation to the end, to the limit of world systems? They said: “No, Lord; no, Sugata”».*

In these characteristics of the empirical reality, proper of Buddhism, is revealed an eagerness for infinitude, a will not to remain confined to narrow spatio-temporal limits — eagerness and will that are certainly proper of the Indian Culture in which Buddhism sinks its roots.

#### INFINITE NUMBER OF BEINGS

The countless universes in the unlimited space are peopled by an infinite number of beings (*sattakāyo ananto*). This is an ancient doctrine that is referred to in *Buddhavaṃsa* I, 64, already quoted.

We can add the following texts in which this doctrine also appears:

*Ta chih tu lun (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, *Taishō* 1509, p. 94 b, lines 4-11:

*«Beings, as the great ocean, are without beginning, middle or end. An intelligent master in calculation, who tried to count them during an infinite number of years, would not arrive ever at the end of the calculation...».*

Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa ad III*, 3 c-d, p. 388:

*«There is not a limit for the three worlds. As is the space so many are the worlds. And therefore, there is not coming into existence for beings that have not existed before and, although the parinirvāṇa of innumerable beings is produced on the occasion of the appearance of each Buddha, there is not coming to an end for beings, as there is not for space».*

#### INFINITE NUMBER OF THE BUDDHAS

As beings, the *Buddhas* are also numberless. Their function, inspired by Compassion, is to save all beings and lead them to Enlightenment. The idea of the

infinite number of the *Buddhas* had a modest origin. From the very beginning of Buddhism, the texts mention the existence of several *Buddhas* of the past. Their number is at first a small one, but it gradually increases and reaches very big proportions: 6 (*Vinaya, Dīgha Nikāya*); 27 (*Buddhavaṃsa*); 55 (*Lalitavistara*); 75000, 76000 and 77000 (*A p'i ta mo ta p'i p'o cha lun [Abhidharma]mahāvibhāṣa[śāstra]*, *Taishō* 1545).

In several Mahāyāna texts the number of the *Buddhas* becomes almost infinite and they are located in the past, the present and the future and in all the extension of space.

The *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, p. 4, lines 6-7, affirms:

«Tathāgatas [= *Buddhas*] so numerous as the powder of the atoms of ten times ten millions of Buddha-Worlds showed their faces».

In *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (*Lotus Sūtra*) are found numerous references to the countless *Buddhas* of the past, the present and the future, as for instance in: p. 22, lines 1-2 (= p. 26 in the Spanish translation):

«Afterwards many hundred thousand of ten millions of hundred thousand millions of *Buddhas* were seen and worshipped by the eight sons of *Candrasūryapradīpa*»;

p. 49, verse 71 (= p. 64 in the Spanish translation):

«There is not in any way a measure for those who in the past in countless cosmic periods have been the many thousands of *Buddhas*, the former *Tathāgatas* completely extinguished»;

and p. 29, lines 3-5 (= p. 41 in the Spanish translation):

«*Tathāgatas* who have worshipped many hundred thousand millions of *Buddhas*, who have fulfilled their Career under many hundred thousand of ten millions of hundred thousand millions of *Buddhas*».

#### DYNAMIC CONCEPTION. THE THEORY OF THE DHARMAS

We can say that Buddhism has a dynamic conception of reality. This manifests itself in the peculiar doctrine of the *dharmas*<sup>3</sup>.

The *dharmas* are the *elements*, the *constituent factors* of all that exists. All that is «material», as human body, is constituted by material *dharmas*. The mental phenomena, as perceptions, sensations, volitions, acts of consciousness, are nothing but *dharmas*. And man is only a psycho-physical aggregate of material *dharmas* and of mental *dharmas*. Reality, in its integrity, is likewise nothing else than *dharmas* — isolated or accumulated.

<sup>3</sup> On the Buddhist theory of *dharmas* see M. and W. GEIGER (1920); TH. STCHERBATSKY (1923); H. VON GLASENAPP (1938); F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI (1978), «La doctrina de los *dharmas* en el Budismo», pp. 91-121, with bibliography.

*Dharmas* are *unsubstantial* (*anātman*), because (using the Western terminology) they do not exist *in se et per se*, or (using the Buddhist terminology) they do not exist *svabhāvena*, i.e. they do not possess an own being; they are *dependent*, produced by causes and conditions. And, besides that, since the first period of Buddhist thought, *dharmas* were conceived as *impermanent* (*anitya*). But several sects or schools that originated after the Buddha's *Parinirvāṇa* (*circa* 480 B.C.) added to the *dharmas* the attribute of *instantaneity* or *momentariness*<sup>4</sup>. Vasubandhu, who exposes the point of view of the Sarvāstivādins - Vaibhāṣikas, emphatically says in his *Abhidharmakośa* IV, 2 d, pp. 568- 569, that «*what is conditioned is momentary*» — and all is conditioned according to Buddhism.

The Theravādins did not accept the momentariness of the *dharmas*, and this explains why they remained attached to the realistic conception of the world. This thesis of the momentariness of the *dharmas* will prevail in the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism, constituted *circa* 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., and it is one of the factors that will give rise to its idealistic conception of reality<sup>5</sup>. In many authors and texts the concept of *momentariness* is fully developed, and arguments for its demonstration are given<sup>6</sup>.

The *dharmas*, as soon as they appear, disappear, and are replaced by other *dharmas* of the same species as long as the causes that provoked the appearance of the replaced *dharma* continue to exist. Thus reality is an accumulation of series of *dharmas*, in a process of vertiginous constant *replacement*. The result is that, as D.N. Shastri (1976) says, p. 189, «*the reality, according to the Buddhist, is not static; it is dynamic. It is not being; it is becoming*».

#### THE CYCLIC PROCESS OF CREATIONS AND DESTRUCTIONS OF THE UNIVERSE

The dynamic nature manifests itself not only in the elements, the *dharmas* that constitute the foundations of reality, but also in reality itself, taken as a whole, since it is in a beginningless process of cyclic alternance of creations and destructions.

This conception<sup>7</sup> is formulated in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* II, p. 142, where it is said that in each cosmic period there are four incalculable periods: 1. the period of complete destruction, dissolution, «in-volving» cycle; 2. the period during which

<sup>4</sup> Among these sects are the Sarvāstivādins, the Vātsīputrīyas, the Mahīśāsakas and the Kāśyapīyas and the sects derived from these, according to Vasumitra; the Pubbaseliya and the Aparaseliya sects, both derived from the Mahāsaṅghikas, according to Buddhaghosa; the Vaibhāṣikas, according to Yaśomitra.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, *Being as Consciousness* (2004), pp. 30-38.

<sup>6</sup> Let us mention, for instance: Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṅgraha* and Kamalaśīla's commentary, Dharmakīrti's *Hetubindu*, and the commentaries of Vinītadeva and Arcaṭa, Dharmottara's *Ḫṣaṇabhaṅgasiddhi*, Jñānaśrīmitra's *Ḫṣaṇabhaṅgādhyāya*, Ratnakīrti's *Ḫṣaṇabhaṅgasiddhi*, Ratnākaraśānti's *Antarvyāptisamarthana*, Jitāri's *Ḫṣaṇabhaṅga*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. L. GONZÁLEZ REIMANN (1988), Chapter 8, on the concept of cyclic existence.

the state reached by the complete destruction remains; 3. the period of creation, «de-volving» cycle, and 4. the period during which the state reached by the creation remains. Each of these periods lasts an incalculable number of years.

This cosmological theory is referred to in numerous texts as for instance:

*Dīgha Nikāya* III, p. 84:

«There is a time, O Vāseṭṭha, when at some moment or other, at the end of a long period, this universe is destroyed... There is a time, O Vāseṭṭha, when at some moment or other, at the end of a long period, this universe is created».

Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga*, p. 356:

«Remembering his former state of existence, the monk, who remembers the cosmic cycles, remembers in those cosmic cycles numerous cycles of destruction, numerous cycles of creation, numerous cycles of destruction and creation».

*Ta chih tu lun*, p. 125 c, lines 25-27:

«I see in the Eastern region limitless number of universes coming into being, subsisting or being destroyed. Their number is very great, it cannot be known. The same occurs in the ten regions of the space».

#### THE LAWS THAT REGULATE OUR WORLD

The empirical reality as conceived by Buddhism is not a chaotic universe. The empirical reality is submitted to laws, principles, norms, which regulate its existence and behavior, which determine what necessarily must happen and *vice versa* what necessarily cannot happen when determined causes and conditions occur or do not occur. Thanks to these laws the universe appears as an organized system, as a *cosmos*.

This Buddhist conception of a regulated universe is rooted in the ancient Vedic conception of a Cosmic Order (*ṛta*) that is either a product of the norms imposed by the Gods or an autonomous self-imposed principle<sup>8</sup>.

#### THE CAUSAL LAW AND ITS UNIVERSALITY

All that exists is for Buddhism under the sway of the law of causality, condensed in the well-known formula: «given this, that occurs». Nothing exists owing to hazard, casually. Everything is the product of the conjunction of a multiplicity of causes. This law of causality is the great law of the universe.

Several Buddhist texts explicitly assert that *everything* is dependent on causes, as for instance:

<sup>8</sup> Cf. CARMEN DRAGONETTI and FERNANDO TOLA, *On the Myth of the Opposition between Indian Thought and Western Philosophy* (2004), pp. 81-91.

*Lalitavistara*, p. 419, line 9:

«All these dharmas are born depending on a cause».

*Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, p. 191, line 12 (= p. 215 in the Spanish translation):

«All these beings have arisen in dependence».

Nāgārjuna, *Madhyamakaśāstra* XXIV, 19 a-b:

«There is not a dharma arisen not in dependence».

Āryadeva, *Catuhśataka* IX, 2:

«An existence not in dependence does not exist at any time for anything at any place».

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE CAUSAL LAW

Causality or «dependent origination» (*praṭīyasamutpāda*) has ever been a fundamental theory of Buddhism, since its origin, along all its history, either when it designated the chain of twelve *dharmas* that produce suffering or when it came to designate *universal contingency* as the supreme law of reality. The importance possessed by the causal law is indicative of its universality.

It is considered by Buddha to be his *Dharma* or Doctrine as said in the *Majjhima Nikāya* I, pp. 190-191:

«That has been said by the Bhagavant: Whoever sees Dependent Origination sees the Doctrine, whoever sees the Doctrine sees Dependent Origination».

Cf. F. Tola and C. Dragonetti, *Cinco Sūtras del Mahāyāna*, p. 42.

According to the *Āryapratīyasamutpādanāmamahāyānasūtra*, p. 71 *infra*:

«This Dependent Origination is the Doctrine body of the Tathāgatas, whoever sees the Dependent Origination sees the Tathāgata».

The *praṭīyasamutpāda* is also considered by Buddha to be the Noble (Buddhist) method, as in *Sanṣyutta Nikāya* V, pp. 388-389:

«And what is the Noble [Buddhist] method which the Buddha's disciple has well seen and well penetrated by insight? In this world, O householder, the Noble Buddha's disciple well and thoroughly reflects on the Dependent Origination: this being, that is; by the arising of this, that arises; this not being, that is not, by the cessation of this, that ceases — ... this is the Noble [Buddhist] method which he has well seen and well penetrated by insight».

Many texts as *Mahāvastu* II, p. 285, lines 7-18; *Lalitavistara*, pp. 346, lines 1-348, line 15; *Buddhacarita* XIV, verses 49-86, express that the discovery by the Buddha of the causal law took place during the middle watch or the last watch of the night in which he attained the most significant moment of Buddha's life, Enlightenment (*bodhi*), the supreme Buddhist goal.

Buddha himself praises the causal law as being profound and as looking profound, and remarks that, through not understanding this doctrine, through not penetrating it, people is in a confused state of mind. Cf. *Dīgha Nikāya* II, p. 55.

And it is a very well-known fact that the Buddhist causality theory is mentioned, developed, explained, commented in numerous Buddhist texts. And many times the Buddha is extolled as the discoverer of this theory.

#### UNIVERSAL INTERDEPENDENCE

The strictest causality, which governs empirical reality in its entirety, implies, as a corollary, the interdependence of all that exists, since every thing is produced as an effect by the conjunction of a multiplicity of things that act as causes; and consequently each of these things that act as causes is on its own turn produced as an effect by the conjunction of a multiplicity of other things that also act as causes, and so on in a beginningless backwards process. The necessity of a plurality of causes and/or conditions for the forthcoming of anything is stated in many Buddhist texts as *Milindapañho* II, pp. 52-54.

A similar process takes place in regard to the effects. Each of the things that are produced as an effect, acting as a cause, in conjunction with a multiplicity of other things that also act as causes produces other things as effects, and so on in an endless forwards process.

The result of this interdependence of causes and effects that pervades the whole reality is a net that relates among themselves all the existing things — momentary, evanescent, interconnected by causal relations, acting all of them at the same time as effect and cause. The universal interdependence is another great law of existence. And it is based on it that Buddhism constructs an ethics of solidarity among all beings, humans, animals, plants, the non-conscious nature and things.

#### OTHER LAWS. THE CONCEPTION OF KARMA

The law of causality manifests itself in other laws that regulate the physical order, the moral order, and the course of the salvific action.

Let us mention, for instance, the law of the inevitable destruction of all that arises, which affects the human body and every kind of life in nature and also material things. Time is the factor that allows the functioning of this law. All is ephemeral, transient, impermanent.

This law is expressed in the well known formula: «*Whatsoever arises is subject to destruction*», referred to in many Buddhist texts<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> As *Udāna* V, 3, p. 49 (= p. 106 in C. DRAGONETTI and F. TOLA, *Udāna. La Palabra de Buda* (2006): Spanish translation from the Pāli text); *Mahāvagga*, p. 11 *in fine*; *Dīgha Nikāya* I, p. 110 (= p. 302 in C. DRAGONETTI and F. TOLA, *Dīgha Nikāya. Diálogos Mayores de Buda* (2005); *Samyutta Nikāya* IV, pp. 47, 107; *Majjhima Nikāya* III, p. 280.

Another law is the law of *karman* or moral retribution of actions. Every action, good or bad, gives rise to merits or demerits and demands necessarily reward or punishment in this life or in other future existences. The destiny of each being depends on his *karman*, i.e. on the moral quality of the actions that he has accomplished in his previous existences.

The *karman* of each individual acting together with the *karman* of other individuals possesses a collective force that determines the destiny of the universe: its destruction, its new creation, the special features it is to possess in its new stage of existence, the events, which will occur in it, etc. Thus the law of *karman* as a whole is the law that governs and controls the Cosmic Order.

This doctrine is referred to in Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa*, while he describes the world where beings are to exist, for instance:

*ad III, 45 c-d, p. 506: «They maintain that the disposition of the universe consisting of three thousand great thousand world-systems is thus: below is the circle of wind placed on the space, coming into being by the sovereign power of the karman of all beings»;*

*ad III, 46 a-b, p. 506: «By the [power of the] karmans of beings clouds, coming together, pour their rain...»;*

*ad III, 60 ante a, p. 518: «On what are the moon and the sun established? On the wind. The winds produced by the sovereign power of the collective karman turn around the Mount Sumeru like a whirlpool»;*

*ad III, 90 c-d, p. 541: «Thus the world, which has disappeared..., during a long time remains being only space until again, through the sovereign power of the karman of beings, soft winds spread in the space, as previous signs of the worlds that will appear in the future».*

Likewise the *Li shih a p'i t'an lun (Lokaprajñāptyabhidharma)*, *Taishō* 1644, p. 223 c, lines 1-9, a text belonging to the Sarvāstivāda Buddhist sect, states that, when the universe is again created, it is by the force of the accumulated *karman* of all beings that God Brahmā and his palace appear in the space as the maturation of the *karman* of beings, and that the *karman* of beings is the only sovereign cause in the creation of the new world.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE LAWS

The laws that govern reality have not been imposed by a Creator, since Buddhism does not accept the existence of a God, Creator and Governor of the Universe. It is the Buddhist atheism which is inserted in the atheistic tradition in India. This tradition is very strong and is shared by a series of non-Buddhist philosophical and religious systems, fully accepted by Hindu orthodoxy.

These laws have not been created by the Buddha either. They have not been revealed to Him by any superior power or even by any human teacher. They are not a construction of His mind, He has not invented them.

These laws, as the empirical reality that they regulate, exist from a beginningless eternity, valid by themselves, always the same, inalterable, necessary,

acting with an ineludible force, not being possible for anything to escape the rigor of their dominion.

These ideas are expressed in the following texts among many others:

*Samyuktāgama*, pp. 164-165:

*«The causal law has been made by the Buddha or by others? O monks, the causal law has not been made by me, the Buddha, nor by others. Whether Buddhas arise or do not arise, stable is that essence of the dharmas or factors of existence, the foundation for the stability of the dharmas. The Buddha having known and comprehended it perfectly by Himself, declares, makes known, establishes, analyzes, reveals, proclaims, teaches, manifests it: given this, occurs that; from the arising of this, that arises...».*

The *Śālistambasūtra*, p. 72 (= pp. 43-44 in the Spanish translation), enumerates the characteristics of these laws in relation to the causal law:

*«He who sees this causality as eternal, without life, lacking life, completely inalterable, not born, not become, not made, not compounded, unobstructed, baseless, calm, fearless, ineliminable, imperishable, whose nature is non-cessation, he sees the Dharma; and he who sees the Dharma in the same way, as eternal, without life, lacking life, and so on as before..., he sees the Buddha whose body is constituted by unsurpassable dharmas».*

*Samyutta Nikāya* II, p. 25, after exposing the causal theory, the Buddha declares:

*«Whether Buddhas arise or do not arise, stable is this principle, the stability of the law, the necessity of the law, the causality...».*

The texts already quoted refer to the causal law whose attributes they describe. But it can be said that these attributes belong also to the other laws. There is not a reason why not, and besides that there is a text in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* I, p. 286, which applies the formula found in *Samyutta Nikāya* II, just quoted, to other laws of reality — those of the impermanence and the painful nature of all compound things and that of the lack of an own being of all the *dharmas*.

#### BUDDHA AS A DISCOVERER AND EXPOSITOR OF THESE LAWS

From the texts just quoted it is evident, as we have said, that the Buddha has not created these laws, has not invented them, they are not a construction of his mind. Moreover they have not been revealed to him by another being. In several texts He proudly affirms that He has had no master<sup>10</sup>.

These laws are there, they have been always there, and the Buddha, after an intense and painful intellectual effort and preparation, in the memorable moment of his Enlightenment, *discovers* the existence of these laws, their nature and their

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Majjhima Nikāya* I, p. 171, *Kathāvatthu*, p. 289; *Mahāvagga*, p. 8; *Milindapañha*, p. 235; *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Part I, p. 132.

functioning. And He has full consciousness of his character of mere discoverer of a reality that transcends him, and to which He has opened his mind and his receptivity in order to allow it to penetrate into him. And in fact it will be the exposition of these laws what constitutes his Teaching, his *Dharma*. His Teaching, his *Dharma*, is thus only the exposition, manifestation, explanation, elucidation, revelation and transmission by him of these laws.

We can say that in the beginning of Buddhist doctrine there was an intellectual act of knowledge, painfully conquered. From the first moment the importance of knowledge and of human effort have constituted essential characteristics of Buddhism.

## **PART II: *Buddhism and Philosophy***

In *Part I* of this article we have already pointed out an aspect of *Buddhist Philosophy of Nature*, which links *Buddhism* also with *Science*, as it explains the Buddhist vision of nature and characteristics of the world. In this *Part II* we add some reflections concerning other aspects of *Buddhist Philosophy*.

### BUDDHIST CONCEPTION OF MAN

Buddhism has also its own conception of man<sup>11</sup> that could be considered as its *Philosophical Anthropology*. This conception differs in many points from the Brahmanical and Hinduist conception of man predominant at the time of its arising, centered around the notion of a soul, and has some points of contact with modern scientific conception of man. A brief reference to this last conception may help to understand and value Buddhist point of view. According to modern scientific conception man is nothing else than his body (brain, heart, etc.) and all the processes originated in it and through it without intervention of any external factor (soul, spirit). Many of the experiences that man has (as bodily growth, for instance) takes place in his body and do not reach either the brain or the conscious level; others (as many sensations-to-be and perceptions-to-be, for instance) originate in the body or in the external world, and through the complex nervous system reach the brain and the conscious level. Others (as thinking, for instance) originate directly in the brain. The ego dissolves itself into more or less independent elements, and all the mechanisms of the brain and nervous system are unconscious until they give rise to cognitive conscious acts. Consciousness is the product of a long evolution of the creatures that were to become the human species.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. F. TOLA, «Tres concepciones del hombre en la Filosofía de la India», in revista *Pensamiento*, Vol. 42, Madrid, 1986, pp. 36-39; F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, «La doctrina de los dharmas en el Budismo», in *Yoga y Mística de la India* (1978), pp. 91-121.

Buddhism did not exactly know, of course, the real nature of the body, especially of the brain and the nervous system, and so it constructed a peculiar model of man conditioned by that lack of knowledge and its basic thesis of the inexistence of a soul.

In a previous section of this article (*Dynamic conception. The theory of dharmas*) we have given a brief description of the *dharmas*, the only constituent elements of all that exists, *including man: unsubstantial* (dependent, conditioned), *impermanent* (transient), as soon as they come to be, they disappear (*momentaneous*).

Let us now add that the *dharmas* are *isolated but linked* one another by the law of causality; *existent as unities* although forming part of a beginningless system; they possess the nature of a point, they lack extent, they are *punctual*. The *dharmas* carry out their productive activity in an *unconscious* way; even the acts or states of consciousness, consciences, which are also *dharmas*, are the product of other *dharmas* (eye, form of the perceived objects, light, space, attention, etc.) that act in the indicated unconscious way<sup>12</sup>.

Man is a conglomerate of series of *dharmas*. The *dharmas* that constitute man can be classified into five groups or series: the series of all the material *dharmas* that are the *corporeal elements*, the body; the series of the *dharmas* that are *sensations*; the series of the *dharmas* that are *perceptions*; the series of the *dharmas* that are *volitions*; and the series of the *dharmas* that are *acts of consciousness*.

These series have been flowing all together like the current of a river, and will flow during a great number of years until man, following the salvific Buddhist Path, puts an end to them, reaching at that moment Liberation, *Nirvāṇa*, the aim of Buddhist effort.

There is no soul to give rise to, to support, to impel, to enliven these series of *dharmas*.

The *dharmas* that are related to a certain series of *dharmas* are integrated in that series, and thus all takes place in the realm of the *dharmas*.

The *dharmas* gathered in series correspond *grosso modo* to the processes, which in the modern theories of man are accomplished in the body, especially in the brain, having the brain and the nervous system as their support. In Buddhism the *dharmas* sensations, perceptions, volitive acts, conscious acts, have been granted a real, external, object-like, self-supporting existence (although causally originated), always acting under the power of the complex mechanism of *karman* and causation, and building the series of *dharmas* wherein they are integrated.

There is no place to ask how, when or why did these series of *dharmas* begin to exist and flow, or how, when and why did consciousness begin to exist and function, because they have had no beginning, they are eternal *a parte ante*, they have been always there, eternally the same<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> See the Spanish translation from the Sanskrit original of the *Shālistambasūtra*, p. 55, in F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, *Cinco Sūtras del Mahāyāna* (2002), pp. 31-72 [= p. 15 of N. Aiyaswami Sastri edition (1950)].

<sup>13</sup> F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, «El *anāditva* (inexistencia de comienzo) en la Filosofía de la India», in *Filosofía y Literatura de la India* (1983), p. 47.

BUDDHIST NOTION OF HUMAN EXISTENCE: TRANSMIGRATION

For Western general belief man's life is only one, it begins with his birth and ends with his death. In India the predominant belief is that man has *many lives* that follow one another; man passes from one to the other, being submitted to many births and many deaths. Buddhism partakes of this belief in transmigration<sup>14</sup>, but if in Brahmanism and Hinduism there is a soul that transmigrates, that reincarnates once and again, one may ask: If Buddhism denies the existence of a soul, what does transmigrate? The answer must be: Nothing. This is an important Buddhist tenet. Buddhism has resort to an original solution, coherent with its own conception of man. This solution is its doctrine of man being a conglomerate of series of *dharmas* that exist from a beginningless eternity<sup>15</sup>.

The long existence to which man is submitted is one and indivisible, but can be theoretically divided in segments, each of which has a beginning and an end and is called *reincarnation*.

The arising of the «first consciousness» of the new segment is related to the cessation of the «last consciousness» of the previous segment. The arising and cessation of both consciousnesses are like the going up and the going down of the two arms of a balance. The arising of the first consciousness of the new segment is metaphorically considered as «birth», the cessation of the last consciousness of the preceding segment, as «death».

The relation between the first consciousness of a segment of the series of existences and the last consciousness of the previous segment of that series is the same that exists in any course of normal life between any conscious state and the next one with the following differences:

1. In the case of the passage from one segment to the next one in the series of existences, together with the last consciousness, there is the *cessation of the material component* (body) accompanying that consciousness and belonging to the finishing segment; and together with the first consciousness there is also the *arising of a new material component* (body) accompanying that consciousness and belonging to the new beginning segment. The material *dharmas* that constituted the adult body that ceases to be is thus replaced by the material *dharmas* of an embryo body in the mother's womb, which will grow and develop, and which is the support of the first consciousness of the new segment. It could be said

<sup>14</sup> F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, «Samsāra y nirvāna», in the book quoted in the previous note, pp. 13-24.

<sup>15</sup> On the question of transmigration without a soul see *Āryabhavasamkrāntināmamahāyānasūtra*, «The Noble Sūtra on the Passage through Existences», in F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI's English translation from the Tibetan translation, in *Buddhist Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1986, pp. 3-18; Spanish version in F. TOLA y C. DRAGONETTI, *El Budismo Mahāyāna. Estudios y Textos* (1980), pp. 19-36. Cf. also the already quoted article on «Samsāra y nirvāna», pp. 21-24.

that consciousness passes from the support of an adult body to the support of an embryo.

2. Moreover, the first consciousness and those which follow it, related to it by the law of causality, and all of them belonging to the same series of existences are not accompanied by the memory of experiences undergone in the preceding segment of the series.

The destruction of the material component (body) and the disappearance of memory conceal the continuity of the series and produce the false impression of the existence of individuals who are born without any connection with anybody in the past, with anybody in the future.

Other changes also occur. Instead of acts or states of consciousness, sensations, perceptions and volitions, characterized by lucidity and clearness and giving rise to the ego experience, as were those of the precedent segment, the acts or states of consciousness, sensations, perceptions and volitions that occur in the embryonic life of the new segment are marked by lack of lucidity and clearness and of the ego experience, which will appear only after the segment has flown during a period of time and the new individual with his normal development acquire them.

#### BUDDHIST EPISTEMOLOGY: THREE FORMS OF CONCEIVING THE WORLD

##### 1. *Realistic conception of Buddhism in its first stages*

In its first period, from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. up to the beginning of Christian Era, Buddhism maintains only an open realistic position, a *naïve realism*<sup>16</sup>. The world is real, it exists independently of man who grasps it with his sense-organs and who thinks it with his mind. But in the world in its totality, submitted to the causal law, in which every thing is an effect, product of the conjunction of a multiplicity of causes and determining conditions, there is nothing substantial, nothing which exists *in se et per se* or nothing that exists *svabhāvena*, i.e. that has an own being that belongs to itself and that depends on itself. Corollaries of the fundamental non-substantialist conception of Buddhism are, on one side, the non-existence of God and the non-existence of a soul in man.

A transformation of the early Buddhist conception of reality is produced around the beginning of the Christian Era, and, because of the evolution of the ancient conceptions, the existence of the external world and likewise the capacity of our sense-organs and of our reason to grasp its nature begin to be doubted. Two great philosophical schools are then constituted: the Mādhyamika School and the Yogācāra School, which will mark new trends to the principal manifestations of Buddhist Philosophy.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. JADUNATH SINHA (1938), pp. 1-60.

## 2. *Voidness (śūnyatā).*

### «Conditionalist» conception in the Mādhyamika School

The Mādhyamika School, founded by the great Indian Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (*circa* 150 A.D.), constructs its peculiar notion of *Voidness*<sup>17</sup> upon the principle of *Causality*, maintained by Buddhism since its very beginning.

The word «voidness» (*śūnyatā* in Sanskrit, *ston.pa* in Tibetan, *k'ung* in Chinese, *kū* in Japanese) means that things are conditioned, dependent on causes, devoid of an own being, or in Western terms that they do not exist *in se et per se*, that they are unsubstantial. The theory of Voidness reaffirms this basic Buddhist principle, placing it in the center of Nāgārjuna's system. But the theory of Voidness offers also a new notion of existence that agglutinates the two forms of existence maintained by the realistic conception of Buddhism in its first stages, and by the idealistic conception of the Yogācāra School after the development of the Mādhyamika School.

According to Nāgārjuna's School things are present before us in everyday experience as compact, continuous, and unitary, and receive a single name. The study of reality reveals us that things are in truth constituted by parts. To be constituted by parts is an aspect of the unsubstantiality that characterized everything, since parts can be considered as the «cause» of the existence of everything. The rope we perceive does not exist as a unitary rope, it is only an aggregate of threads, and these at their turn do not exist as unitary entities, they are only an aggregate of filaments, and so on. Movement is a series of diverse processes, which in many cases may not constitute in themselves advancing movements, although they contribute to the advancing movement of the whole to which they belong, as for instance the running of a man or animal; any emotion, passion, sentiment is constituted by a number of psychological or mental processes that although being composed by multiple elements receive a common name as if they were a unity: love, hatred, fear, faith. Thus, according to Nāgārjuna, when we perceive things, they really are before us, but they are not as they appear. When we examine them, they dissolve themselves into their parts and subparts, and what we had previously seen, disappear before our eyes. It could be said that things in a certain way partake both of being and not being.

The empirical reality is thus characterized by conditionality, relativity, dependence, the fact of being composed, the fact of being perceived under a form which is not its own. The notion of *Voidness* expresses this way of being.

## 3. *Idealistic conception of the Yogācāra School*

The Yogācāra School, founded by Maitreyañātha (*circa* 300 A.D.), affirms *the sole existence of mind (cittamātra)*, of consciousness (*vijñāna*)<sup>18</sup>. For this school

<sup>17</sup> See F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, *On Voidness* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2002); and *Nihilismo Budista. La doctrina de la Vaciedad* (1990).

<sup>18</sup> F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, *Being as Consciousness* (2004); *El Idealismo Budista. La doctrina de «solo-la-mente»* (1989); «La estructura de la mente según la Escuela Idealista budista

the only thing that exists is *ideas, representations, mental creations*, to which nothing real corresponds.

Let us remember that for Buddhism, from the very beginning, mind or consciousness is only a series of states of consciousnesses, of acts of knowledge. These cognitive acts constitute the mind; there is not an entity outside and different from them, permanent and autonomous which «has» these acts of consciousness, which is what «experiments» them as their inalterable witness or seer. The idealistic school maintains that thesis, but adds (contrarily to what Buddhism thought in its beginning) that to the succession of representations, which constitutes mind, does not correspond any real correlate.

The empirical reality in which we exist has in this way the same ontological *status* as dreams or illusions created by magic. Nothing distinguishes the vision of the reality in which we move from oneiric visions or from the phantasmagoria created by the magician or from the hallucinations to which suggestion gives rise.

The naïve realism embraced by Buddhism in its first stages or in the period of the developing of sects which followed the death of the Buddha, has left the place to an extreme idealistic view, where beings and objects disappear as real entities and where only entities of mental nature remain.

If for the School of Nāgārjuna the empirical reality becomes the *Great Void*, for the Yogācāra School reality is only a *Great Illusion* created by mind submerged in error.

The prodigious Universe imagined by the ancient Buddhist thinkers, infinite in time, unlimited in space, peopled by an inconceivable number of world systems, with their incalculable millions of millions of beings, and with their incalculable millions of millions of Buddhas guiding the infinite beings to their Liberation, in a permanent transformation, regulated by laws of universal validity, has become — in the Yogācāra conception — a product of human mind, a dream of that shadow that is man, who depending only on his own effort and counting only with the help of the Teaching of the Master, looks for the path that leads to Enlightenment — the foremost degree of intelligence, knowledge and consciousness — and will allow him to reach that realm of peace and silence, the beatitude of extinction, the supreme Nirvāṇa.

### **PART III: *Buddhism and Religion***

Buddha preached his *Dharma* (Doctrine) in India twenty five centuries ago, and his Teaching spread throughout all Asia in a pacific way by the sole power

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(Yogācāra)», in *Pensamiento*, No. 182, Vol. 46 (1990), pp. 129-147; «Philosophy of mind in the Yogacara Buddhist idealistic school», in *History of Psychiatry*, Vol. 16, Issue 4, No. 64, Cambridge, December 2006, pp. 453-465.

of his word and the example of his monks. Full of respect for the diverse cultures it encountered, Buddhism was influenced by them and took from each of them elements that enriched it giving rise to the forms of Buddhism known today as *Indian Buddhism*, *Chinese Buddhism*, *Tibetan Buddhism*, *Korean Buddhism*, *Japanese Buddhism*, and *Southeast Asian Buddhism*. Notwithstanding their diversities all of them show a basic unity as a *Salvific Path* centered around the *Three Jewels*: the *Buddha*, the *Dharma* and the *Saṅgha* — the *Buddha* venerated everywhere as the supreme Master, the *Dharma*, the Wheel that never moves back in its permanent dynamic progress, and the *Community*, the Four Assemblies, he founded himself in the sixth century B.C., of the monks and the nuns, of the lay male devotees and lay female devotees, alike in their veneration for the Master and in their faith in his teachings.

Buddhism pointed out an *aim* and a *path* to reach it to millions of persons, and gave them confidence and energy on affirming that there is a «going out» (*nīsarāṇa*), a way to escape from suffering, Salvation; around Buddhism an intense spiritual life and a deep reflection on all the aspects of human existence were developed.

#### THE AIM TO ACHIEVE

The aim that Buddhism proposes to man is *Enlightenment* (*bodhi*) leading to *Liberation* (*vimukti*, *mokṣa* in sanskrit, *vimutti*, *mokkha* in pāli), liberation from the painful chain of reincarnations (*saṃsāra*) to which he is submitted by the force of his own actions (*karman*), in other words: Liberation for sentient beings from the painful condition of existence, since the only form under which existence manifests itself is reincarnations. Liberation is *Nirvāṇa* (*nibbāna* in pāli), Extinction compared to the extinction of a flame of fire.

To appreciate in a correct way the attraction that *Nirvāṇa* conceived as extinction could offer to Buddhists, it is necessary to see it from the perspective of Indian culture, where it was a very generalized belief that man is enchained to an eternal and painful transmigration. To get free from it was something to be desired as it was the only way to put an end to recurrent pain and suffering. Any teaching which offered a path for deliverance from transmigration, as the Buddhist did, could be looked upon as something positive, and such was well received and adhered to. The exalting terms applied to *Nirvāṇa* like *śānti* / *sānti* (tranquillity), *śīva* / *sīva* (auspiciousness), *sukha* (happiness), and the joyous monastic poems, *Theragāthās* and *Therīgāthās*, where monks and nuns express their happiness because they are sure that they are ready for entering *Nirvāṇa*, putting an end to reincarnations, give us an idea of the positive feeling that the notion of *Nirvāṇa* awoke in Buddhists.

It is obvious that this Buddhist or Indian feeling in relation to extinction granted by *Nirvāṇa* is very far from the Western feeling that impels man to aspire to immortality.

## THE PATH TO FOLLOW

To achieve this aim Buddhism provides man with an appropriate teaching. Following this teaching man is sure to attain it.

Enlightenment (*bodhi*) according to Buddhism is an extraordinary experience, beyond speech and reason, where verbalization and conceptualization have no entrance, and where it is believed that one attains a *sui generis* knowledge that cannot be attained in another different situation. After the experience has ceased, the person, who had that experience, is able, resorting to a verbalizing and conceptualizing process, to inform about the knowledge he has obtained.

To attain Enlightenment (*bodhi*) according to Buddhism is not an easy task. It requires the firm decision to dedicate all own efforts and energy to that purpose. And this exertion must be maintained during an infinite number of reincarnations. In each one of them one has to acquire, practice and lead to perfection many virtues, venerate innumerable Buddhas, hear their preaching and follow their example; one has also to submit to a strict intellectual discipline in order to acquire the Buddhist teachings, centered around the *Knowledge* of the true nature of reality, and *Compassion* regarding all living creatures, and one must master the meditation technique systematized by Yoga practices. Thus one prepares oneself to the Enlightenment experience.

The Buddha prepared Himself for such an experience and, in a memorable night, according to all Buddhist traditions, expressed in numerous texts, He obtained the *Bodhi*.

Which knowledge did the Buddha obtain in His *Bodhi* experience? He perceived the Four Noble Truths<sup>19</sup>: 1. the Noble Truth about Suffering (*dukkha*), 2. the Noble Truth about its Origin (*dukkha-samudaya*), 3. the Noble Truth about its Cessation (*dukkha-nirodha*), and 4. the Noble Truth about the Eightfold Path that leads to cessation (*aṭṭhaṅgikā dukkha-nirodhagāminī paṭipadā*). Each of these *Four Noble Truths* covers a very complex set of truths, principles, laws, norms, rules, etc. The totality of the truths, etc., that constitute each of these sets, is nothing else than the Buddha's Doctrine.

Buddha perceived *tota et simul* the Doctrine of the *Four Noble Truths*, in its complete fullness and astonishing richness. The Masters that came after Him in the following centuries gradually unfolded, unveiled, disclosed all the contents of the Buddha supreme intuition.

The *First Noble Truth* asserts that man is subject to suffering, which adopts manifold forms: birth, old age, sickness, death, to be with what one dislikes (*apriya*), to be separated from what one likes (*priya*), not to get what one wants — all this are human experiences imposed on us by our human nature and all this is cause of suffering. The words *priya* and *apriya* cover persons, things, ways of life, experiences, etc. that one cherishes or that one abhors, that produce positive feelings or that produce negative feelings — the bright or the dark aspects of life. All these

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Samyutta Nikāya V, Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*, p. 420.

forms of suffering are *dharmas* (factors, elements, constituents of existence) or *saṃskāras* (aggregates of *dharmas*). And *dharmas* and *saṃskāras* — all things — are impermanent (*anitya*), painful (*duḥkha*) and without an own self (*anātman*)<sup>20</sup>. Suffering is inherent in every thing that composes our reality; it is a part of its nature.

The *Second Noble Truth* points out the cause of suffering: desire (*tṛṣṇā*). The principle that underlies this assertion is that everything that exists has a cause. A strict determinism reigns in our reality; nothing is left to chance or hazard; nothing can be produced if the adequate causes are not present.

The *Third Noble Truth* deals with the end of *desire*, the elimination of *suffering*, the cessation of *reincarnations*, the suppression of *existence* under the form of reincarnations. The state in which all these facts are given is called *nirvāṇa*, *nirvṛtti*, whose basic meaning is «extinction»<sup>21</sup>.

*Nirvāṇa* is an Absolute. It does not belong to our empirical reality, it is something completely different from all that exists in this reality, it is transcendent and heterogeneous, beyond words and reason<sup>22</sup>.

The *Fourth Noble Truth* is the *Noble Eightfold Path* (*āryaṣṭaṅgamārga*) that leads to suppression of suffering. It is a moral Path. It establishes the rules that must guide the actions of the persons that wish to get rid of suffering. The *Eightfold Path* is constituted by right views (*samyagdr̥ṣṭi*), right intentions (*samyak-saṃkalpa*), right speech (*samyagvāc*), right action (*samyakkarmānta*), right living (*samyagājīva*), right effort (*samyagvyāyāma*), right mindfulness (*samyaksmṛti*) and right mental concentration (*samyaksamādhi*). Many Buddhist texts of Hīnayānist and Mahāyānist inspiration contain numerous norms on moral conduct that make more explicit the items of the *Noble Eightfold Path*<sup>23</sup>. On the basis

<sup>20</sup> See *Majjhima-Nikāya I, Mahāmāluṅkyasutta*, p. 435; *Dhammapāda* 277-279 = p. 314 in C. DRAGONETTI and F. TOLA, *Dhammapada. La Esencia de la Sabiduría Budista* (2004); *Āṅguttara Nikāya I, Uppādāsutta*, p. 286; *Samyutta Nikāya III, Aniccāsutta, Dukkhasutta* and *Anattasutta*, p. 21, *Anattalakkhaṇasutta*, pp. 66-68, etc.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Majjhima Nikāya I, Mahāmāluṅkyasutta*, p. 436 = *Mahāniddeśa*, p. 20, line 11; *Mahāvagga, Brahmajāyācānakathā*, p. 5, lines 2-4; *Samyutta Nikāya I, Saññojanasutta*, p. 88, verse 210, II, *Kosambisutta*, p. 117, §§ 26-27, p. 278, III, *Sattasutta*, p. 190, § 15; *Āṅguttara Nikāya V, Sāriputtasutta*, p. 9, § 3; *Udāna* III, 10; VIII, 1 and 3; and also P. Oltramare, *L' Histoire des idées théosophiques dans l'Inde*, pp. 441-460.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the celebrated *Udāna* VIII, 1-4.

<sup>23</sup> As examples of these texts we mention *Dīgha Nikāya I, 1, Brahmajālasutta*, §§ 7-27 (= pp. 35-50 in the Spanish translation); XXXI, *Sīṅgālovādasuttanta, Dhammapāda, Udāna, Jātakas* (see *Vidas anteriores de Buda*) of Hīnayānist inspiration, and *Wu liang I ching. El Sūtra de los Infinitos Significados*, translated from Chinese into Spanish by C. DRAGONETTI and F. TOLA (2000), especially the first chapter and p. 23, note 17, *Pa ta jen chiao king: El Sūtra de los ocho conocimientos de los grandes seres predicado por Buda*, translated from Chinese into Spanish by M. DZAU DZAN, F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, in *Revista de Estudios Budistas*, México-Buenos Aires, No. 11, abril 1996, pp. 69-77, and in F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, *Cinco Sūtras del Mahāyāna* (2002), pp. 107-129, *Ratnāvalī, Suḥṛllekha, Sūtrasamuccaya, Bodhisattvacaryā* of Śāntideva, *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and *Śrāvakabhūmi* of Asaṅga, etc., of Mahāyānist inspiration.

of such texts it is possible to construct a Buddhist moral system characterized as a lofty, complete, subtle set of moral rules<sup>24</sup>.

#### **PART IV: *Buddhist methodology for directing the mind***

From its very beginning Buddhism has prescribed rules that man who wish to attain the true nature of things must follow. These rules are of application to any activity of the mind in any of the fields already mentioned: Science, Philosophy or Religion. Let us mention some of these norms which intend to direct human mind in order to get a correct *Knowledge*, one of the two essential elements to reach the Buddhist goal: Liberation, together with *Compassion*. We leave purposely aside in this article the rules, laws, principles and norms derived or having to do with Buddhist *Logic* (the principle of contradiction, the law of excluded middle, the law of identity, the syllogism and the diverse forms of inference, the fallacies to be avoided in debate, the definitions, etc.) and that are an important and well known part of the Buddhist methodology for directing the mind in a correct way, because they would deserve a development exceeding the limits of this article.

##### 1. OBJECTIVITY

In a small treatise attributed to Nāgārjuna, the most outstanding thinker of the Mādhyamika School, *Pratītyasamtpādahdayakārikā*, «Stanzas on the Essence of Dependent Origination»<sup>25</sup>, is found a famous stanza (7) that has been quoted many times in Buddhist texts and that states a most important Buddhist principle of thinking: the search for objectivity. The stanza reads as follows:

<sup>24</sup> Buddhist Ethics can also be studied in the works of a great number of modern authors as A. G. S. K., «Bodhisattva», in G. P. MALALASEKERA (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. III, Fascicle 2, pp. 224-233; M. ANESAKI, «Ethics and Morality (Buddhist)», in J. HASTINGS (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. V, pp. 447-455; L. DE LA VALLÉE POUSSIN, «Bodhisattva», in HASTINGS (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, pp. 739-753; R. SPENCE HARDY, *Manual of Buddhism in its Modern Development*, Chapter 10; É. LAMOTTE, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien, Des origines à l'Ère Śaka*, pp. 73-82; H. OLDENBERG, *Buddha, Sein Leben, Seine Lehre, Seine Gemeinde, Herausgegeben von Helmuth von Glasenapp*, pp. 267-306; BHIKKHU PASĀDIKA, «Early Mahāyāna Lay Ethics in Nāgārjuna», in *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, 1996, pp. 3-18; H. SADDHATISSA, *Buddhist Ethics, Essence of Buddhism*; L. DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN, *La morale bouddhique*; F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, «El Budismo frente a la justificación de la violencia en la India Antigua», in *Pensamiento* (Madrid), Vol. 55, No. 211, 1999, pp. 105-126; HAR DAYAL, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*; P. OLTRAMARE, *L'Histoire des idées théosophiques dans l'Inde, La Théosophie bouddhique*, pp. 114-149; WALPOLA RAHULA, *What the Buddha taught*; P. HARVEY, *El Budismo* (1998), pp. 228-246.

<sup>25</sup> Translated and commented by F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI in *Revista de Estudios Budistas*, México-Buenos Aires, No. 12, Octubre 1996, pp. 54-63.

*«Nothing from reality must be suppressed,  
nothing must be added to it,  
reality must be seen as it is in truth:  
who sees reality attains Liberation».*

Knowledge must be objective, must be limited to what one perceives, without adding to the representation in the mind or without suppressing from it any thing of any nature.

A clear and intelligent comment of this principle is given already in one of the most ancient Buddhist texts, the *Udāna* I, 10, p. 8 (= pp. 47-48, C. Dragonetti and F. Tola's translation), already quoted in note 9:

*«O Bāhiya, thus must you train yourself: in the seen there must be only the seen, in the heard only the heard, in the thought only the thought, in the cognized only the cognized. O Bāhiya, thus must you train yourself: when in the seen there be only the seen, in the heard only the heard, in the thought only the thought, in the cognized only the cognized, then, O Bāhiya, you will not be there; when you, O Bāhiya, will not be here, then you, O Bāhiya, will not be in this world nor in the other world nor between both: this is just the end of suffering».*

When man sees reality and does not add to his perception any affective link, he has already obtained detachment, and is ready for Liberation.

Aśvaghōṣa (flourished between 50 B.C. and 100 A.D.), *Saundarānanda*, Canto XIII, stanza 44, has the same stanza, with some variants, as the one presented by Nāgārjuna in his just quoted treatise on Dependent Origination. Aśvaghōṣa introduces in his poem this stanza in relation with the control of the senses that the Buddhist has to exercise, thus with an openly moral intention. If man perceives objects just as they are in themselves, *without adding* to them qualities that are created just by human subjectivity and that objects really do not possess in themselves, he will not be dominated by sensuality. Aśvaghōṣa says, *ibidem*, in stanza 53 of Canto XIII:

*«Thus, objects of the senses are not by themselves  
a cause either of bondage or of Liberation;  
it is association with some special attribute  
just created by mind  
that becomes cause of bondage or of Liberation».*

Maitreya's *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* V, 21, the already mentioned founder of the Yogācāra School, refers to this principle in relation to the conception of emancipation: it should be seen as it is in reality: nothing should be added to it, nothing should be taken away from it.

Sthiramati (middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D), considered as one of the great masters of the Yogācāra School, in his treatise *Madhyāntavibhāga ad I*, 8, p. 23, Pandeya ed., refers to the principle in connection with his own conception of the Absolute in the context of Buddhist idealistic theories.

Buddhaghosa (first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century), the great Buddhist commentator, in his *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, a commentary to the *Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 12, takes the principle as an hermeneutic rule for the interpretation of the Buddha's words that

should be respected as they essentially were said: without adding to nor suppressing from them any thing that could change their essential meaning.

## 2. MANYSIDEDNESS AND PERCEPTIVISM

According to the notion of *manysidedness* all has many aspects or faces, and according to the notion of *perspectivism* it is possible to perceive any object from different points of view, each of which gives a different vision of the object. Both ways of seeing reality are in truth two forms of referring to the same fact: *manysidedness* takes the object as reference and maintains that everything presents itself to our view in multiple forms; *perspectivism* takes the subject as reference and maintains that one or another of those multiple aspects are perceived according to the place in which the subject is situated, according to the point of view he adopts. Buddhism considered *manysidedness* as well as *perspectivism* as true ways of conceiving reality: *manysidedness* as an essential characteristic of the object of knowledge and *perspectivism* as an essential characteristic of the cognitive act. Both of them put a limit to knowledge, depriving it of the aspiration of *unique truth* and of *universal validity*. For Buddhism all this has to be taken into account as another principle for the correct knowledge in any research on reality. Many Indian thinkers, Buddhists and non-Buddhists<sup>26</sup>, have partaken of these conceptions.

The Buddhist monk Suhemanta affirmed in *Theragāthā* 106:

*«Things have hundreds of attributes,  
hundreds of characteristics;  
the ignorant sees one of them,  
the wise, hundreds».*

Let us add, following a common expression in the Buddhist texts, that the Buddha could see «with his divine, pure, and superhuman eye» *all of them*.

The well known story of the blind men and the elephant told by the Buddha himself in *Udāna* VI, 4 and 5 (C. Dragonetti and F. Tola's Spanish translation, pp. 133-140) constitutes a good illustration of these principles of *manysidedness and perspectivism*. In this text are presented blind men who touched each one only one part of the body of an elephant and each one of them got in this way his own limited and as such erroneous idea of what an elephant is, and trying each of them to impose on the others his own idea, violently disputed one another. Buddha concludes His narration with the following words:

*«Men, who perceive only one side of things,  
adhering to it, quarrel with one another».*

Paṇḍita Aśoka, a Buddhist author who lived *circa* 1000, in his important treatise *Avayavīnirākaraṇa*, «The refutation of the whole», p. 8 (Sanskrit text in

<sup>26</sup> Cf. for instance BHARTṚHARI, *Vākyapadīya* I, 74, II, 136, II, 482, II, 484.

F. Tola and C. Dragonetti's ed. = p. 26 of their English translation), clearly describes the nature of perception according to Buddhism, pointing out the *partiality* it involves in itself and its *dependence* on the place the subject who perceives is located: what is visible of any object is only a part of the object; there is no difference between the situation of an object either covered or uncovered: both are only *partially* seen, we never see the totality of the object, because we do not perceive the parts of the object that are in the rear side, opposite to the side in which we are, and the parts that are between both sides. The author concludes that we always see a part of the object; we never see the object in its integrity. Paṇḍita Aśoka adds that the vision of the object also depends on the position of the perceiver in the moment of the perception.

The thesis that we always have a partial vision of objects is also referred to as a Buddhist thesis in Hindu authors as Uddyotakara, *Nyāyavārttika*, ad II, 1, 32 (p. 471, Munshiram Manoharlal ed.), and Vācaspati Miśra, *Nyāyavārttikatātparyāḥikā* ad II, 1, 32 (p. 474, Munshiram Manoharlal ed.), when they expose the Buddhist point of view concerning perception.

### 3. EMOTIONAL DETACHMENT IN JUDGEMENTS

Buddhism has a special attitude concerning judgments: the rule is not to be emotionally involved, to have the calm to discriminate between good and evil, between true and false. Any state of exalting feeling added to the judgment is considered by Buddhism as an obstacle for reaching the truth in any field of knowledge. This rule is clearly taught, for instance, in *Dīgha Nikāya* I, 1 (*Brahmajālasutta*), pp. 32-34, C. Dragonetti and F. Tola's Spanish translation:

«5. "O monks, if others blame me or blame the Doctrine or blame the Community, you should not on that account either feel anger or discontent or displeasure. O monks, if others blame me or blame the Doctrine or blame the Community, and if on that account you should be angry or offended, that would be for you an obstacle. O monks, if others blame me or blame the Doctrine or blame the Community and if on that account you should be angry or offended, would you then be able to judge what is well said or what is badly said in what is said by the others?"

"No, Sir".

"O monks, if others blame me or blame the Doctrine or blame the Community; then you should distinguish what is wrong as wrong in this way: 'That is false, that is not true, that is not found in us, that does not exist in us'".

6. "O monks, if others praise me or praise the Doctrine or praise the Community, on that account you should not feel either joy or happiness or exultancy. O monks, if others praise me or praise the Doctrine or praise the Community, and if on that account you should be filled with joy or you should be filled with happiness or you should be exultant, that would be for you an obstacle. O monks, if others praise me or praise the Doctrine or praise the Community, then you should acknowledge what is true as true in this way: 'That is true, that is not false, that is found in us, that exists in us'".»

#### 4. THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF THE CASE

This Buddhist principle has to do with correct knowledge and the moral qualities which are also required on the part of the person who wants to attain that knowledge. The text we have chosen to illustrate this principle especially concerns the knowledge of the true nature of other living beings, but its teaching can be applied in a broader sense to the examination of any case in any context.

*Udāna* VI, 2, pp. 64-66 (= pp. 130-133 in the Spanish translation) tells that on a certain occasion the king Pasenadi of Kosala asked the Buddha if all those ascetics that had just passed by not far from them were Buddhist holy men (*Arhants*) or men in the way of acquiring that holy condition. The Buddha answers:

*«If they are arhants or they have entered the path that leads to arhantship — this is something difficult to know for somebody as you, O Great King, who are a householder, enjoying the pleasures of the senses, living a life encumbered with children, taking delight in the aroma of sandal wood from Benares, wearing garlands, perfumes and unguents, and who finds pleasure in the possession of gold and silver.*

*O Great King, it is living together with a person that one may know his morality, and that too for a long time and not for a short time, and only if one observes him attentively and not carelessly, provided that one be intelligent and not a fool. O Great King, it is dealing with a person that one may know his purity, and that too for a long time and not for a short time, and only if one observes him attentively and not carelessly, provided that one be intelligent and not a fool. O Great King, it is in times of misfortune that one may know the strength of a person, and that too for a long time and not for a short time, and only if one observes him attentively and not carelessly, provided that one be intelligent and not a fool. O Great King, it is talking with a person that one may know his wisdom, and that too for a long time and not for a short time, and only if one observes him attentively and not carelessly, provided that one be intelligent and not a fool».*

According to Buddhism for any examination of things and beings that intends to attain a true knowledge of their respective nature many special intellectual and moral qualities are required on the part of the person who carries it out. He cannot be immersed in a frivolous and mundane life full of attachments, dedicated to sensuality in its manifold manifestations, dominated by covetousness. He, endowed with effort, has to keep a deep concentration of mind centered only on the elected object; basically he must possess intelligence, capacity to grasp and to understand, and lucidity.

These qualities, and those connected with them, constitute important elements of Buddhist Ethics. Attention, mindfulness, concentration of mind, energy, effort, earnestness, intelligence, wisdom, are seen by Buddhists as moral qualities to be developed.

## 5. FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND PERSONAL EFFORT TO ATTAIN TRUTH

This Buddhist rule for directing the mind in a good way enjoins an attitude based on *freedom of thought* and *personal effort* each one should assume in any matter of thinking.

On one hand one should not adhere to an opinion *by authority*: i.e. only because it is maintained by Tradition (*āgama*) or by one's own Master (the *Buddha*) or by the Holy Buddhist Scriptures (*Piṭaka*) or by someone endowed with knowledge, expert in the Holy Texts (Hindu *Guru* or Buddhist *Arhant*). On the other hand one has not only to be guided in his thought and action *by logic and reasoning*. It is necessary to think *by oneself* on any matter, to reach *one's own* conclusions taking into account the opinion of wise persons with experience in the matter and after a careful examination of the consequences.

The first text we have chosen to illustrate this principle belongs to the most ancient period of Buddhism and is found in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* I, *Kesamut-tisutta*, pp. 188-193<sup>27</sup>.

On a certain occasion the Buddha came to the village of Kesamutta, where the Kālāmas people lived. They told the Buddha:

«O Lord, some samaṇas and brāhmaṇas come to Kesamutta. They proclaim and expound their own doctrine, but they criticize, despise, abuse and revile the opposed doctrines. And afterwards, O Lord, other samaṇas and brāhmaṇas come also to Kesamutta. They also proclaim and expound their own doctrine, but they criticize, despise, abuse and revile the opposed doctrines. And when we listen to them, O Lord, doubt arises in us, uncertainty arises in us: "Who among these venerable samaṇas and brāhmaṇas tells the truth, who lies"?».

The Buddha answered them:

«It is proper that you doubt, O Kālāmas, it is proper that you feel uncertainty. Your uncertainty has arisen in relation with a doubtful matter. Do not be guided, O Kālāmas, by mere hearsay or by tradition or by what you have heard or by somebody's proficiency in the Holy Scriptures or by a mere logical inference or by a mere methodological inference or by the mere reflection on the causes or by an obsequious compliance with any theory or by the mere appearance of likelihood or by thinking that the samaṇa (ascetic) who holds it is your Master. When you, O Kālāmas, by yourselves reach the knowledge: "These things are bad", "These things are blameworthy", "These things are blamed by the wise", and that these things, when performed and undertaken, lead to harm and sorrow, then indeed you should reject them, O Kālāmas».

Other important text concerning this principle is from a later period of Buddhist development and belongs with all probability to a Mahāyāna Sūtra. It is quoted by the two great Buddhist philosophers of the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka School (a synthesis of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra): its founder Śāntarakṣita

<sup>27</sup> Cf. F. TOLA and C. DRAGONETTI, *Budismo. Unidad y Diversidad*, pp. 159-176, where the complete Spanish translation of the *Kesamutisutta* is included with a previous commentary there on. See also *Aṅguttara Nikāya* II, *Bhaddiyasutta*, p. 191.

(flourished in the 8<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>28</sup>, and his illustrious disciple and commentator, Kamālaśīla (circa 740-795)<sup>29</sup>. Kamālaśīla also comments this stanza said by the *Bhagavant* (= Buddha) *ad Tattvasaṅgraha* 3586-3587.

It is a quite praiseworthy attitude of this founder of Buddhist Culture to ask his followers to submit his teachings and words to a severe scrutiny before accepting them, and not to adhere to them *by mere respect* for his person.

The text, attributed to the Buddha himself and addressed to his monks, says:

«As gold is accepted by the experts  
after testing it by heat, cutting and rubbing with the touchstone,  
my word, O monks, is to be accepted  
after being carefully examined  
– not out of respect for me».

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<sup>28</sup> In his work *Tattvasaṅgraha* 3587, p. 1115.

<sup>29</sup> In the Introduction of his commentary *Pañjikā ad Tattvasaṅgraha*, p. 15, and in his work *Nyāyabindupūrvapakṣasaṅkṣipta*, preserved only in Tibetan (*Sde-dge* edition, Tanjur, *Tshad-ma*, *Tōhoku* 4232, *We.* 92a<sup>2</sup>-99b<sup>5</sup>), p. 93 a (= p. 185 *Sde-dge*, Delhi edition).

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