

Das Buddhistische Haus

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## The importance of Buddhism for our time

by Dr. Paul Dahlke

When the good man weeps, the bad man laughs, when the weak man suffers, the mighty man rejoices in his power, when the honest man lives in want, the rogue in splendor, when we see the noble man in the treadmill of everyday life, in which he seems to bleed to death, the shallow man in the comfortable leisure of a personal independence which his narrowness does not know how to fill - in short, when we see all these violations of a cosmic justice, of which every moment of reality is full, the thinking man demands two things: as a practitioner, a remedy; as a theorist, a deepening of knowledge down to that original root which embraces and thus comprehends this tangled mass of opposites. He demands a point of view in which feeling is no longer offended by the mind and, conversely, the mind is no longer disturbed by feeling. That level of cognition in which the mind understands everything that happens as lawful and thus as necessary is called a world view. One can justifiably speak of it only where cosmic justice is not believed but understood.

Our time has neither a worldview nor a remedy for the thousands and thousands of social hardships. On both sides, epistemologically and practically, people get lost in insoluble contradictions. The one seeks to satisfy the hardships of thought in faith in the soul and God, the other in the cool arithmetic of a strictly mechanical worldview. One demands more love for the hardships of social life, the other more police. One fights against impoverishment, against begging, against immorality, against drunkenness, against national diseases, against infant mortality, against war, etc., etc., without being able to say that any real help has ever been achieved on any of these points. Just as the barking of the "Doggie from our stable" shows nothing but that we are riding, so the noise of the welfare and peace congresses shows nothing but the inexorable roll in which all our conditions find themselves.

In all these struggles against social ills, we are like people who are trying their hardest to bail water out of a sinking boat rather than plug the leak. We remain stuck in the symptoms, hence the unsuccessfulness of all these struggles. What is scooped out at the top penetrates from below.

The same thing happens in the intellectual sphere.

The further the human mind progresses, the wider and more decidedly the gap between faith and science widens and is felt more and more embarrassingly by every thinker. The more sharply science elaborates its mechanical view of the world, the more starkly the standpoint of faith stands out against it. The latter teaches that behind this world of phenomena there is a transcendent, a divine power, from which this whole game first acquires meaning and significance; science, on the other hand, teaches that there is nothing in all world events but what presents itself to the senses, or rather: that one needs nothing but the vivid in order to be able to create a world view.

Now the position that man assigns himself in nature ultimately depends on whether he sees world events as something that is ordered by an unknown third party, a transcendent, a god in some form or other, or whether he sees it as a system whose affairs are ordered independently from within itself - in other words: whether a higher power is watching on our backs or whether we are among ourselves.

A person who is completely insensitive to whether or not someone else is watching what he is doing, whether or not what he is doing is "noticed" - such a person does not exist. Accordingly, a person will always be influenced in some way in his behavior towards others, depending on whether or not he assumes a transcendent, divine entity behind world events. The awareness that there is a higher authority will cause him to exercise caution on the one hand and consideration on the other. In the free play of forces, which today we call the "struggle for existence", certain automatic inhibitions will intervene to prevent the unscrupulous pursuit of this game. These inhibitions will be absent where one does not believe, where, as the mechanical world view does, one recognizes nothing but what one presents to oneself sensually, vividly. Hence this brutal play of forces, as it presents itself in such a frightening way in the "progress" of our civilization, in this ruthless "struggle for existence", as it shows itself actively in a blind pushing forward as far as it goes, - passively in an equally blind resistance against this pushing forward.

Every act of consideration for others, every act of self-restraint, of selflessness, is an act of morality.

Such an act, if it is not to be mere dressage or asceticism, requires motives. Faith provides such a motive: the fear of a god, or as we usually say: the fear of God. Science lacks such a motive. It is a-moral, just as it is a-religious.

Now it is a fact that faith cannot be learned. Those who do not have it cannot acquire it. One can only be a believer, but not become one.

Yes, on the contrary! It is the same for faith as it is for energies in the physicist's energetic world view: it becomes inert: it is subject to what the physicist calls the law of "entropy". And every thinker must ask themselves the question: "Where will the world obtain the necessary moral content when faith has disappeared? Just as the physicist asks himself the question: "Where will the world obtain the necessary amount of energy when all heat has disappeared?"

What distinguishes our time and our situation from all previous ones is that the entire surface of the globe has been opened up to modern civilization or is in the process of being opened up to it. This is of the utmost importance for our problem. We lack a saving barbarism which, as in the times of the crumbling Roman Empire, could replenish the exhausted stocks of faith. The prospect of our ageing earth being supplied with new, young material of faith from another planet is still a long way off. We are therefore in the predicament of having to create new moral values from within ourselves to replace those lost with the dwindling faith.

That is the task of modern people and modern times. The question of whether we shall soon come to master the air completely, to extend wireless telephony over the whole globe, and what other such problems there are, all rooted in the one question: "To what extent will it be possible to conquer time and space, to shrink them to infinitely small sizes?" - all this is by no means so important as the question: "Where do we get new moral values from?" The world can very well exist without all these advances in civilization; yes, there are even many who claim that it can exist better without all this - but it cannot exist without morality.

Our time is indeed working on the creation of new moral values, but all these values deny their artificial, synthetic character just as little as the synthetic medicines of modern chemistry deny their artificial character. They lack the inner necessity that is inherent in everything natural. All moral experiments of our time retain the character of experiment or sport. They can proceed as they do; but they could also proceed differently, and yes, in an emergency they could be omitted altogether.

They are all results, functions of feeling, but not results, functions of cognition. One feels that doing good is better than doing evil, but one does not understand the necessity of it. But as long as I do not understand this, I am basically a fool or a coward if I forcibly suppress my desires. Man's whole, innermost being is geared towards seeking pleasure, towards satisfying it. If he is to fight against it, he must have reasonable motives. He must understand that good is self-

rewarding, bad is self-punishing, he must understand cosmic justice.

This is where the Buddha comes in.

Cosmic justice, which every thinker does not want to believe but wants to understand, arises from the doctrine of kamma (karma), which is the significance of Buddhism for a world view. The Buddha teaches that every living being is a combustion process through and through. As such, it is a form of individual energy that takes on a new value at every moment of existence because it blossoms, so to speak, together with its material, develops. Just as the heat-energy of a flame bursts forth anew at every moment from its preconditions and according to its preconditions, so the ego-energy (the kamma) of a living being bursts forth anew at every moment, taking on a new biological value in its volitional impulses. Every living being sustains itself through its volitional impulses in its volitional impulses.

Energy is necessary, a non-sensual, because yes, everything sensual is form, an expression of energies.

I-energy is also necessarily non-sensual. But it becomes sensual, comprehensible to the individual being itself as consciousness.

This solves the cardinal question of every worldview: "Is there a non-sensual?" in a truly ingenious surprise.

There is a non-sensual, but it is not transcendental in the way that belief would have it, but rather, where it is possible to ask this question at all, this non-sensual is also there at the same time as the only thing in the whole world that is directly accessible to me: my consciousness.

And nothing is necessary to understand it as such, as energy.

"It is cetanā (thinking) that I call kamma," says the Buddha himself.

In consciousness, the individual experiences through introspection, intuition in himself that the force on the basis of which he exists is not an "inherently constant" or "soul", but something that springs up anew from its preconditions at every moment. It experiences in itself, in its feelings, in its conscience, that this power represents a new biological value in every moment of existence, that this value changes with what it does, what it says, what it thinks. He experiences it in himself that, precisely because thinking is energy itself, he is able to give himself a change of direction from within at every moment. It is the great experience of the thinking person when he realizes: "Where I wanted to do the bad, I can choose the good; and I can do that because thinking is power itself."

From the insight: "I am entirely the form of a purely individual energy, my kamma", the conclusion of "rebirth according to deeds", so unheard of for Westerners, arises as a mental necessity.

Energy can never have arisen where it is, it must be there from the beginningless. The fact that it is there necessarily means that it has never not been there.

My kamma, the force on the basis of which I now say "I", has always been active, not as a free force - that would be a matter of faith - but always in dependence on its material, just as every physical energy is only there in dependence on the material in which it presents itself. Reality never shows force for itself or material for itself, but only the unity of both: processes. The purest type of real process is the process of combustion. The fact: "I am there" means: It burns from beginninglessness. If a form of existence disintegrates in death, the kamma of the same immediately takes root anew at the site, in the mother's womb, to whose procreative material it is specifically, uniquely attuned and ignites a new ego process here, which will take shape according to the procreative material that serves as its fuel, so to speak. The maternal egg cell and the paternal sperm cell only form the possibility for the new living being, which only realizes itself, blossoms into reality, when it enters, when the energy strikes.

Depending on the biological value that my kamma represents at the moment of death, the new place to which it is biologically attuned will be constituted. In other words, the nature of my next existence will depend on the nature of my character. Because my character is my kamma. And kamma, the ego-energy, takes hold at the moment of death on the procreative material where it can take hold, because it has to take hold there and precisely there as a result of its specific, unique attunement - rebirth according to deeds!

This is not the place to go into the kamma doctrine in detail. Elsewhere (Buddhismus als Weltanschauung, Verlag Walter Markgraf, Breslau) I have endeavored to bring us closer to these

ideas, which have become completely alien to our one-sided, inductively bred thinking, but which are in truth the natural ones. Here it must suffice to state that the Buddha's teaching of kamma provides the cosmic justice that every thinker does not want to believe but wants to understand.

Once I have understood this "cosmic justice", the repercussions must necessarily be reflected in my behavior.

If I have understood that everything I do, speak and think is realized in myself, then those self-acting inhibitions in the free play of forces that were lost with the waning of faith will reappear. Of course, the motives in both cases are fundamentally different. Instead of the "fear of God", there is the "fear of myself". The Buddha's kamma teachings result in a natural morality that no longer has its roots in the quicksand of feelings, like any religious morality, but in the cool, secure depth of understanding.

The two miracles that are inexplicable from the point of view of science - dying, i.e. the apparent disappearance of energy on the one hand, and being born, i.e. the apparent re-emergence of energy on the other - are resolved here in a unified understanding: The coming into being here demands the passing away there.

It is the dying with which the being born must be bought. Just as the warmth that disappears here corresponds to the movement there, so the being that disappears here corresponds to the new being that arises there. The whole world event is understood out of the world event, which science tries in vain to show, and yet the intellectual necessity of real forces, which faith does justice to in its act of faith, is saved. But just as the movement that emerges from a certain heat value is neither the same as the heat that has disappeared, nor a different one, so the new living being that comes into being here in birth is neither the same as the one that died there, nor a different one. Nothing can be said but: It burns! It burns from beginninglessness, strictly lawful according to the circumstances and preconditions. It is the unmitigated self-responsibility that compels the individual to morality, and Buddhism is the true religion of man, because it shows man himself as a self-responsible being.

Morality, which arises with the Kammal doctrine as a necessity, as a function of comprehension, is the first and most important fruit of the Buddha's thought, proof of its "reality". For what is real is what works. And that I have grasped the Buddha is proven by the fact that I am seized by him, that he has an effect on me, determines my behavior in every moment, forces me to be selfless.

Buddhism is the only one of all religions, of all world views, of all philosophies, that has a real morality, i.e. a morality that is a function of understanding. Therein lies its irreplaceable importance for every time and especially for our time.

One asks:

Will the individual be able to follow this must? Will this demanded selflessness not remain a dead categorical imperative?

No: the must is accompanied by the can. Both result from the single act of understanding. When I have recognized that I am a combustion process existing on the basis of a purely individual energy of beginninglessness, in which there is no soul like a red thread as something permanent in itself, as something eternal, but in which each "now" only creates the next "now" out of itself again and again, as with the flame, this means: "I am true self (atta), not an "I" in the vulgar sense, as something identical with itself. In the introspection I become completely accessible to myself as a pure combustion process, as something that sustains itself out of itself. The force on the basis of which I am there becomes comprehensible to me, the individual, as "consciousness" and proves itself to be something that is always springing up anew in every moment. Because every moment of consciousness is a new "now". Thus:

I am neither a mere balancing process of tension-differences, which is what the mechanical world view wants to make me into, nor am I a soul-endowed being, one that is identical with itself, a real "I", which is what faith wants to make me into.

The Buddha expresses this my being as a real combustion process with the word anatta = non-self.

And this brings us back to the question above: "Is it possible to follow the precept of

selflessness?"

The answer is: I can be selfless as soon as I have understood myself as selfless, as anatta. Then selflessness is in harmony with my understanding. I would have to lie against myself if I still wanted to be selfless after I have comprehended!

This brings us to the other irreplaceable significance that Buddhism has for everyone and especially for our time:

It softens, it relaxes the struggle for existence.

All social ills ultimately stem from this blind, uncritical struggle for existence. Because we are incapable of grasping the meaning and significance of life; because we do not know what we are, we make "life" a value in itself and thus the struggle for existence a necessary virtue, something that belongs to humanity, to human dignity. In an unnatural reversal of concepts, the struggle for existence has become the goal of the struggle itself. And in this idea we have become so mentally brutalized that we can no longer ask the question of the *raison d'être* of life and thus of the struggle for existence, or do not dare to do so.

The leak in the vehicle of social life is this blind addiction to life, this uncritical drive to live, this ruthless grabbing and grasping that doesn't even know why it is grabbing and grasping.

Help can therefore only come from correct thinking.

We are all drowning in the fact of "life" like a person in the ocean. Only the Buddha enables the individual to gain a point of view that allows him to ask in a coolly critical way about the *raison d'être* of life itself. Once I have understood that life is not a value in itself, not something, but something that carries its *raison d'être* in itself, but something that has to create this *raison d'être* for itself again and again, that it is the individual who has to "give value to life", that life has no value at all except that which we give it ourselves, this will have the deepest influence on the assessment of all life values. From the insight into this beginningless self-sustaining, silence is born. Slowly, but irresistibly, that cool, clearly conscious decision to step back, to give up, to renounce will rise like the moon from the dark womb. "No thing is worth it." In the real understanding of life, one comes to the realization that "life" is something that would be better off not being there, because it is a game without a beginning, which is self-sustaining and therefore pointless.

This game cannot come to an end by forcibly breaking it off - yes, that would only mean changing the stage - but by increasingly weakening the attachment to life through an ever clearer understanding of the nature of life. The ever new rise of new kamma in the impulses of will ceases.

Westerners are only inclined to reject the Buddha teachings as pessimism. This is wrong. Buddhism is a teaching of reality. The Buddha does nothing but guide us to real thinking. He shows life for what it really is: as a value of a conditional nature. The consequences for the individual that necessarily follow from this have nothing to do with the teaching itself. If, as a merchant, I have lulled myself into the delusion of a surplus due to incorrect bookkeeping and now find a deficit in correct recalculation, my intellectual power has not actually eliminated that surplus, but has done nothing but calculate correctly, for yes, it could also have brought to light a greater surplus the other way round. In the same way, if life is found to be "insubstantial" in correct thinking, this is not a struggle against life and its values, but simply a correct calculation of the example of life. The Buddha is not a preacher of penance who exhorts us to sackcloth and ashes. He only teaches correct thinking; everything else arises merely as a function of this new understanding of mine.

Our spiritual life in every form can be understood as a revaluation of the values of life that have always existed. This revaluation may go as far as reversal in pessimism, yes, even to the point of raw, violent destruction in suicide - it always remains a revaluation. It always remains the same dough that is kneaded, in a more or less witty way. All these attempts are opposed by the Buddha with his kamma teaching, which results in the devaluation of all life values, which have become worthless and fall into the hands of the thinker - voluntarily.

Here, of course, comes the commonplace interjection: "What would become of the world if everyone thought Buddhist!"

This objection has meaning and significance only as long as one works with "world" as an empty concept. The real world is the sum of everything that exists, first and foremost the sum of living

beings. If I have recognized the conditional value of life in the insight into individual beginninglessness; if I have understood that selflessness, giving up, cessation is not only a duty, but the only true satisfaction, because it brings me into harmony with myself, then I can only wish the same for the other person if I want him well. And the question "What will become of the world if we all think Buddhist?" has the same value as the question: "What will become of the banquet if all the guests leave the house?"

With the insight into the beginninglessness of the processes of life, every goal of life disappears. Only one real goal remains: the cessation, the entering into the beginningless game.

As long as one has not understood one's own nature, this conclusion will always appear unnatural. Once one has understood, the resulting conclusions are a natural function of this understanding.

Now the Buddha thought is an intuition, and indeed the only pure intuition that is possible - namely an intuition concerning my own consciousness, which, it should be noted, must not be confused with the enlightening act of faith, but is nothing more than, so to speak, a flash of insight into reality itself, which our ignorance prevents us from grasping as such.

As pure intuition, the Buddha thought is inaccessible to the means of proof of science, which are always of an inductive nature. Proving in the sense of science means: tracing something back to something known. This possibility is automatically ruled out in the case of consciousness, even if modern psychology itself does not shy away from this ultimate absurdity. Consciousness is itself and nothing more and demands nothing but to be understood as such. It is the "aude sapere" that confronts the thinker here in its strictest, purest form.

How the limited intuitions of science - Robert Mayer's law of the conservation of force, Galileo's laws of gravity, Newton's laws, etc. - are not abstracted directly from experience, which is impossible precisely because reality shows neither a pure law of conservation nor a law of gravity, etc., but rather from a patient, attentive letting of thought. - are not abstracted directly from experience, which is impossible precisely because reality shows neither a pure law of conservation nor a law of gravity etc., but have arisen from a patient, attentive letting of thought rest on the facts\*, so too the Buddha intuition can only arise from a patient, attentive letting of thought rest on itself. Buddhism is a pure "process of reflection", a throwing back of thought from the world, where it is always at home in the vulgar human being, onto itself.

But this requires peace and solitude. They are the prerequisites for all real thinking. But the modern way of life hardly allows for either of these. This blind struggle for existence, these ever new goods of civilization, with which a highly developed and never resting technology showers us, alienate us more and more from ourselves, make it almost impossible for the individual to have contact with himself, to be alone with himself.

Modern civilization, with its outward drive, has made it so that nothing has become more alien to us than ourselves. And once the individual meets himself by chance, he knows nothing to do with himself - being alone with himself makes him bored or frightened and with all the greater determination he throws himself at the other, at the Other. Because we do not recognize ourselves and therefore cannot find the "goal" of life within ourselves, we are addicted to finding it in work, in the blind struggle for existence, in which we constantly set ourselves new goals. In this erroneous view, "work" has become the vice of modern civilization that prevents us from finding ourselves.

The individual must understand his own nature, must understand that it is fruitful, beneficial to be with oneself, to reflect on oneself in order to seek this intercourse with oneself. It is like a *Circulus vitiosus*: because we do not communicate with ourselves, we do not get to know our own value - which only arises when we understand our own responsibility - and because we do not know our own value, we increasingly lose the inclination to communicate with ourselves, preferring to live in a more or less intellectual conceptual world that increasingly atrophies our sense of reality. A change, a turnaround in this erroneous circle can only come here by showing the true teaching.

It seems to me that the most important result in the spiritual life of our time is that more and more signs of puzzlement, searching and thoughtfulness are becoming noticeable.

Of course, all these different approaches have so far been fruitless, because they are not rooted in the topsoil of understanding, but in the quicksand of feeling.

Here, in the realm of these seekers, lies the future of Buddhism.

For the time being, of course, by far the largest number of these seekers are still caught in the golden meshes of the great pantheistic net, which more easily satisfies man's feeling than the purity of the Buddha potion, which has been increased almost to the point of insipidity.

But if man really thinks, if he is really in spiritual need, and if he hears the teaching, he may well be able to unravel this golden net, to dissolve it into the flickering play of evening sun threads. Nothing is further from the real thinker's mind than to fester against the ills of a world drowning in the thirst for life. He willingly leaves this to those heroes of faith who, with the fervor of their emotional values, want to bring about the transformation that every founder of a religious faith dreams of, provided that he does not waver at the cross itself. The real thinker can do nothing but show and teach: "That's the way it is!" He can do nothing but wait patiently until he encounters the spirits who understand, who resonate congenially when the true nature of life and its values are explained to them. Ordinary people will only laugh at this explanation or be outraged by it. He simply cannot understand that one can leave life opportunities unused, any more than a hungry handyman can understand that one can leave a dirty penny untouched along the road.

One interjects:

"So the cultural significance of Buddhism is practically nil. Because there are hardly any people who would be inclined to accept the Buddha teachings, at least not within our cultural world."

But this conclusion is wrong. Everything spiritual is a growth.

Just as man grows into certain physical possibilities, so he grows into certain mental possibilities. What would be impossible for a child to comprehend, even if one exhausted oneself in the most apparently convincing arguments, is comprehensible to a man without any arguments. He has simply grown into it. In the same way, it would serve no purpose to try to impose the Buddha-thought on a non-understanding world with the seemingly most convincing arguments. One can only show, patiently show again and again, until the growth of this or that individual has progressed sufficiently in showing to be able to comprehend what still appears to him as an incomprehensible perversity.

Just as to the savage of Xingú the military discipline and its manifestations would appear ridiculous or insane, so to us savages of modern civilization the Buddhist's discipline of thought, which strives with iron consistency towards extinction, appears ridiculous or insane. One must have understood. And in order to understand, you have to grow into it gradually.

Buddhism is breeding, self-breeding based on a real insight into life and its values.

Therefore:

Show, patiently show again and again: The power of truth is fermentative. It does not come as a sudden enlightenment, but emerges step by step through reflection and patience. But once the smallest grain has taken hold, it develops by itself, through itself.

(\*) When Newton was asked how he had made his discoveries, he replied: "By constantly resting my thoughts on one object."

"Victorious over all gifts is the gift of truth." (Dhammapada)