

Das Buddhistische Haus

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## The lie in Buddhism

by Dr. Paul Dahlke

Before it is worth saying anything about lies in Buddhism, it is necessary to understand the nature of Buddhism.

Buddhism, the original pure Buddha word as set out in the Pâli canon, is a teaching of reality. Of course, the religions of faith also say: "We are reality teaching! We teach the essence of reality, the divine, the eternal, that which exists in itself, as opposed to the transient, the changeable; we teach being as opposed to mere becoming."

That is true, but the question arises: is reality a being that is contrasted with this sensual becoming, which confronts us everywhere as transience? We are thus embarking on a search for truth, and the search for truth requires one thing first and foremost, one indispensable thing: impartiality. The seeker of truth who does not go on a search per se, but on a search for God or a search for eternity, i.e. who goes on a search with a fixed route from the outset and already knows in advance what he has to find, is not a seeker of truth. For the unbiased, genuine seeker of truth, there is only one truth: reality, and only one goal in the search for truth: harmony with reality.

Reality is work! Any other definition is necessarily biased. Once again: reality is action. To make something out of it that is either caused or that acts autocratically is, in the former case, to fall short of reality, in the latter case to exceed it. The former case is the case of science, as a mechanical-materialistic world view, within which every moment of world events is brought about by another; the moment that brings about something is itself brought about by another, so that in this view the whole of world events becomes a mere retro-reality, to which ultimately only one question remains: Where is the first necessary application of this system of retroactivity, the first active agent, the *primum movens*? Faced with this view of world events, the question that Aristotle poses with such convincing force - "There must be a first beginning" - becomes a necessity of thought that cannot be escaped. But consider that the intellectual necessity of the conclusion is not there in itself, but only comes into being with the conception of world events as something that is effected in every moment, as an infinitely large system of repercussions. Wrongful employment creates wrongful inference, and the mental compulsion, the "strict logic", as they say, does not lie in reality, but in the sin against it.

Now this view of science is not wrong in itself. The whole of world events, insofar as they are subject to the laws of mechanics, obey this view, as is clear from the ability of science to calculate in advance. This view is correct, but it is only conditionally correct and has only hypothetical value when applied to the whole. In contrast, faith's view of reality as an autocratic agent, a force in itself, is a view that in its nature transcends reality just as much as science undercuts it. Of course, this view also has its roots in reality. We see the trees growing, we hear the birds singing,

etc., but we do not see the force on the basis of which everything takes place.

We do not see life, but only the phenomena of life and conclude with the same convincing logic: consequently, there must be a force in itself that is the only thing that is active, that is "life" itself behind these phenomena of life.

I will give the closest example, the doctrine of descent. Science says: man descends from his parents, which experience has shown to be true; but these descend again from their parents, etc., in a series that either finds a limit in the act of faith of primordial generation or ends in determined agnosticism. Faith says: man is descended from his parents only according to his gross physical dress; according to his eternal essence he is descended from the autocratic power, the purely active being, which religions commonly call "God".

And this is where Buddhism, i.e. the pure Buddha word, comes in and reveals its essence. Buddhism teaches that reality is neither an agent (force in itself) nor an effect (substance in itself), but an effect itself and that there is only one reality in the world that is accessible in its essence: namely that which everyone experiences in himself and as which he experiences himself. Whereby he then experiences himself as a nourishing process.

There is only one reality in the world: it is called nourishment, and nourishment is neither something that works nor something that is worked, but work itself, through and through work, just as the flame is through and through burning. "All beings are nourishment by nature." Applied to the doctrine of descent, this means that man descends neither from God nor from his parents, but from his own work (kamma-yoni), and the parents only provide the counter-stand, the specifically attuned elective basis for this work (kamma). There is no space here to go into this idea further. Let us just say this much once again:

There is only one reality in the world that is accessible, and that is the one that everyone experiences within themselves, and it experiences itself as nourishment.

Just as "fall" is the keyword to which the world of science listens, just as "power in itself" is the keyword to which the world of faith listens, so "nourishment" is the keyword to which the world of reality listens. But what is nutrition in essence? I answer: by its very nature it is the process of self-affirming power, i.e. power that is not there "in itself", in the sense in which philosophy uses the word "in itself" (a sense which, incidentally, has no meaning at all), but which is only ever there on the basis of the preconditions it sets itself; in other words: power that is not there as something existing in itself, but which, in order to be there, must always first spring up anew from its own preconditions, just like the flame, i.e. the flame that finds its burning power in itself. i.e. its burning power is not there "in itself" as a given, but in order to be there, it always springs up anew from the preconditions that it sets for itself in the body of the flame.

There is only one reality in the world that is accessible as such, that is the only reality that everyone experiences as an I, as a personality, as an individuality, and he experiences it as through and through nourishment, as working, through and through working.

Just as the flame is nothing but burning and leaves no room either for a pure effect (repercussion) in the sense of science or for a pure effect (primordial effect in the sense of faith), so in right insight nothing remains with the I, with the personality, but reality in the sense of a pure, complete effect (kamma).

I must content myself here with these summary hints. To summarize, I will only say this much again:

Reality is neither reality in the sense of something that has merely taken effect, as science would have it, nor reality in the sense of something that works freely in an autocratic way, as faith would have it, but reality is working, working through and through, and this reality experiences itself as such in this unique reality that everyone calls "I", and it experiences itself here as a pure

process of nourishment, in which consciousness is not the spectator of the play of life, but the link between those two worlds which, in the whole of the rest of human life, confront each other as the opposites of force and substance, spirit and body, soul and body, in short: as the opposites of nourisher (nourished) and object of nourishment (nourished). The great mystery of the mediation of opposites takes place in consciousness, in that in it spirit repeatedly becomes body, becomes intertwined, is reflected as form, which in truth is not form per se, but spirit-form, consciousness made flesh as form. What is the eye? Formed consciousness. The ear? Formed consciousness. The fingers of my hand? Formed consciousness and the whole:  
Nutrition as an experience

"This body, monks, does not belong to you, does not belong to others (that is, it is neither a soul-endowed self nor a mere product of experience). This is to be regarded as old work (purânamkammam), as a result of working, as a result of thinking." And further: "I will show you old work. And what is old work? The eye is old work, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, thinking is old work."

Once again: according to my essential reality, I am not descended from God, not from my parents, but from my own work. And how is that? Because I am through and through nothing but activity, just as the flame is through and through nothing but burning.

## II. Truth and lies as a form of nourishment

I had to make this preparation in order to be able to say anything at all about the nature of lies in Buddhism. For, as everywhere else, Buddhism also occupies a unique special position on the subject of "lies", as must be the case with a teaching that overcomes the conceptually insurmountable opposites of force and substance, mind and body, body and soul in the experience of nourishment. Nourishment is that in which the force beats itself into the shackles of form and becomes sensual as the spirit form, commonly called ego, personality. There is no such thing as a core of being on which the waves of appearance could break: a solid core of being that could remain untouched by what is going on outside, in the coarse dress, a reservation mentis in the real sense of a purely spiritual reserve that stands nobly above the common fussing and jostling of the "flesh". As with the living flame, which has no solid core, so here everything goes "through and through". Nutrition is that in which the conceptual difference between inside and outside, between core and shell, between essence and expression retains only conventional meaning. Certainly there is an inside, there is an outside; there is a core, there is a shell, but not as fixed entities, but as processes of action that are in a constant transition from one to the other, precisely in the relationship of nourishment.

The first characteristic of reality and the first sign that someone really experiences reality is this: That the opposites of every kind fall, not in a conceptual unity that can never be overcome, but in the experience of nourishment, in which inside becomes outside again and again, core becomes shell again and again, power becomes its sensual form again and again. In ordinary spiritual life, the lie is the antithesis of truth, and as this antithesis it is something that stands outside the truth of the core of essence and as such does not touch this core of essence. In this view, lying is a mere characteristic that can and must be exorcized, possibly with punishment and violence according to the recipe of Mirza-Schaffy: "Whoever lies must be beaten." Just as moths are beaten out of a precious fur, the lie is to be beaten out of this precious essence. In Buddhism, i.e. in the real insight into reality, in the insight into the real reality, this idea of the oppositeness of lie and truth has come to an end. Where truth is not an intrinsic being that presents itself in an eternal essence, but a pure process of nourishment, lies can no longer be its antithesis! Just as where light and darkness do not remain mere concepts, but become the reality of the uninterrupted merging of day and night, so also in real insight truth and falsehood become uninterrupted transitions of one and the same reality: nutrition. It is the case that light, by showing itself, also shows darkness, and it is the case that knowledge, by showing itself, also shows the ignorance of others.

Reality and the knowledge of it is ultimately all there is; there is nothing apart from reality and the knowledge of it. Nothing at all. Thus reality emerges from a phase in which it is there without the knowledge of it, into the conscious phase in which knowledge also corresponds to a real object, and ends in a phase in which the knowledge of reality no longer corresponds to an object, an empty knowledge, a pure poetry, i.e. a mental work of art, the prototype of which is the lie. A lie is knowledge without a corresponding reality, a concept without an object; as such, it is a sister of deception-error, of that pure doctrine of ideas, of art in its thousand forms and even of religion, insofar as the latter is transcendent, i.e. transcends reality itself.

There is no such thing as transcendence, i.e. a transcendence of reality other than purely fictitious.

Reality cannot be transcended. Admittedly, it is not fixed here once and for all in this spatial reality, defined, delimited as a closed and bounded mass; it progresses, but it does not transcend itself, but as growth it takes itself with it in the process of transcending itself, and the ideas of a beyond of reality as transcendence in the religious-believing sense is a fiction for the unprejudiced thinker, just as the idea of a physically closed mass of reality in the sense of science is a hypothesis. Reality is growth, is growth in every form, individual or general, and growth means transcending oneself in such a way that one takes oneself with one, and in which there is no transcendence, no transcendent being as such, but in which, on the contrary, the impossibility of something identical with oneself, an ego-self (atta = soul), experiences oneself - an impossibility that the Buddha calls anatta (non-self, amethaphysical).

A religion, insofar as it is a religion of faith, i.e. insofar as it works with the idea of transcendence, can cope without pia fraus, without pious deceit, i.e. without lies. Ultimately, the pious lie is the first and most indispensable of all life-sustainers. The proton pseudos stands at the cradle of all reality, it itself again and again from reality as a unity of reality and echo, which still exists for a little while after the reality to which it owes its origin has already passed, but which even during this brief existence receives replenishment from a new reality, so that the only coherent thing in world events is deception, which deceives itself.

"Lies have short legs", says the proverb, and this applies to all reality, which only exists as knowledge of it, as an empty concept. It hangs there without a living base, and even if it appears to be founded on eternity as the pia fraus of religions, as the "idea of transcendence", it is still only a semblance. In order to be able to exist, it must be constantly supplemented anew from the real reality and from the knowledge of it, and it can always be supplemented anew from this real reality, because this real reality itself is supplemented from the one reality that exists without the knowledge of it, this reality that the Buddha calls non-knowledge (avijjâ). Only in a reality which, according to its first approach, originates from the ignorance of itself, do truth and falsehood have a place. In essence, they are both forms of reality, only the former as a reality in which the knowledge of it is combined with real content, the latter as a reality in which the real content has disappeared and only an empty knowledge, an empty conceptual structure remains.  
- Reality in the paradoxical form of non-reality.

This reality content of the lie, this indispensable supplementation of reality by the lie, is most clearly represented in what is commonly called pia fraus, the pious deception. Name me a religion of transcendentalism that can do without pia fraus! I know of none! For the real thinker, transcendentalism itself is the pia fraus that never fills itself with reality.

When I came to the temple town of Srirangam on a journey in South India, the leading priest showed me a place in the vast temple area where, as he said, God Shiva sleeps with his wife once a year. I looked at the man smiling and he replied with a smile: "What do you want to do! People demand such things!"

They say: That's paganism! Crass paganism! I say: I don't think that makes the difference. It is not my place to engage in polemics against other religions and their beliefs.

But when it comes to the idea of transcendence, the thinker trained in the Buddha's words is only ever reminded of that discourse in which it says as follows: "Just as if, Vasettha, this Aciravati River were full of water to overflowing, so that the crows could drink from it, and a man came along who wanted to go to the other bank, was about to cross over to the other bank, was looking for the other bank, was eager to cross over to the other bank. Standing on this shore, he would call to the other shore: 'Come over here, other shore! Come over here, other shore! What do you think, Vasettha, for the sake of the man's call, his entreaty, his supplication, his fervent desire, would the Aciravati River's far shore come over to this shore?' - "Not that, Mr. Gotama."

Condemning fraud is superfluous, indeed bad work. It is much better to show the truth. Fraud condemns itself, because there is ultimately only one judicial authority before which everything is decided: reality. Before it, lies and deceit judge themselves. What has no right to exist will condemn itself here one day. What is true will endure.

### III. The cleaning

This insight into the nature of falsehood as a mere artificial concept without a real object also explains the special position of falsehood among all other vices. The prohibition of untruthful speech (*musâvâdâ veramanî*) is one of the five *sîlas*, the discipline exercises of Buddhism.

The resolution to abstain from killing living beings, the resolution to abstain from taking what is not given (theft), the resolution to abstain from unchastity, the resolution to abstain from false speech (lying), the resolution to abstain from intoxicating drinks are the five *sîlas* that must be practiced by everyone whose mind is set on inner progress; but that lying occupies a special position among them is clear from the following narrative:

In one of the *Jâtakas*, i.e. the rebirth stories of the Buddha, the *Harita-Jâtaka*, it is reported that the *Bodhisatta*, the future Buddha, was once reborn in a high, rich Brahmin family and was given the name *Harittaca* (golden skin) because of his golden skin color. After the death of his parents, when he has their great fortune in his hands, he thinks: "The money is there, but the creators of this money are no longer there. What is such dead wealth worth!" He makes the sacrifice of poverty and goes to *Himavant* as a penitent, where he soon attains the higher faculties.

On his wanderings he comes to *Benares*, where King *Brahmadatta* asks him to stay with him as a "field of merit", i.e. as a worthy object of alms. Here he is entertained by the king himself. One day, when he has to go to war, he hands over the care of the "great being" to his wife with the words: "Do not neglect the field of our merits!"

She follows this rule faithfully, but one day *Harita* meets her in an unguarded moment and falls in sensual love. This relationship becomes notorious and comes before the king, who thinks: "I don't believe it. They only want to divide him with me! When I return, I will ask him myself." On his return, he first asks his wife: "Is this and this true?" - "Yes, sir!" But even now he still doesn't believe. "I'll ask the saint myself!" He goes to him and says:

"I have heard, *Mahâbrahmana*,  
*Harita* enjoys pleasures,  
but this speech is false,  
and are you still pure?"

Then he thought: "Even if I were to say: I do not enjoy, this king would believe me; but in this world there is no support like the truth.

If one abandons the truth, one cannot attain Buddhahood, even if one were already seated on

the Buddha throne. It is for me to speak the pure truth."

In the bodhisatta's case, there may well be the killing of living beings or the taking of what is not given or unchaste activity or the drinking of intoxicating beverages, but there is no such thing as deliberate deception that reverses the meaning, in short, lying.

What is the basis of this special position of lying as an un-entity, i.e. as something that only has empty conceptual existence and only has reality behind it in the sense that a reflex or an echo has it behind it? One can confess to any other vice and thus know oneself to be in harmony with oneself, commit an act of truthfulness; but one cannot confess to the vice of lying, because confessing to it means telling the truth. A liar who professes the vice of lying is no longer a liar, i.e. lying is a contradiction in terms, incompatible with the act of truthfulness and thus the vice of all vices.

In the part of the Buddhist canon called the Sutta-Pitaka, the book of discourses, there is a discourse entitled Ambalatthika-Râhulovâda-Sutta, i.e. the discourse on Râhula's exhortation given in Ambalatthika.

Râhula was the Buddha's only son, and this discourse shows that this only son must have lied on some occasion, so that on reading this text one is led to think that the Buddha had met the fate of most great men in producing epigones. We are perhaps faced here with the tragedy of the House of Gotama: the son as a liar who, despite having become a monk, never reached the highest. In fact, in the Anguttara Nikâya I, Râhula is listed as the first of those "fighting against lusts", but not among those who have attained the highest, arahatship. I give the text in a condensed form.

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying in Râjagaha, in Veluvane at Kalandakanivapa. At that time the Venerable Râhula was staying in Ambalatthika. Then at evening time the Blessed One, having risen from solitude, went to Ambalatthika to the Venerable Râhula. And the Venerable Râhula saw the Blessed One approaching from afar and prepared the seat and water for his feet. And the Blessed One sat down on the prepared seat and rinsed his feet. The Venerable Râhula, having greeted the Blessed One reverently, sat down to one side. Then the Blessed One, leaving a small amount of water in the water container, said to the Venerable Râhula thus:

"Do you see, Râhula, this small amount of water left in the water container?" - "Yes, O Lord." - "Just as small, Râhula, is the asceticism of those who are not afraid of deliberate untruth." Then the Blessed One, pouring out the small amount of water completely, said to the Venerable Râhula thus: "Do you see, Râhula, this small remnant of water poured out?" - "Yes, O Lord." - "The asceticism of those who are not afraid of deliberate untruth is poured out like this." Then the Blessed One, turning the water container upside down, said to the Venerable Râhula thus: "Do you see, Râhula, this inverted water container empty and hollow?" - "Yes, O Lord." - "Just as empty and hollow is the asceticism of those who are not afraid of deliberate untruth." - "Just as if, Râhula, a king-elephant with tusks like a plowshare, swelling mass, of noble lineage, takes part in battle, he does his work with his front feet, does his work with his hind feet, does his work with his front body, does his work with his hind body. He does his work with his head, with his ears, with his teeth, with his tail, but he holds back with his trunk. Da weiß dann der Elefantenlenker: Dieser Elefant verrichtet sein Werk mit den Vorder- und Hinterfüßen, mit dem Vorder- und Hinterkörper, mit Kopf, Ohren, Zähnen und Schwanz. But if, Râhula, the king elephant also does his work with his trunk, then the elephant driver knows: He also does his work with his trunk. The king elephant has given his life. Nothing will now be impossible for him. In the same way, Râhula, whoever is not afraid of deliberately false speech, nothing will be impossible for him, I say. Therefore, Râhula, not even in jest will I speak falsehood. Thus you have to practise.

What do you think, Râhula, what purpose does a mirror serve?" - "The purpose of looking at oneself, O Lord." - "In the same way, Râhula, contemplating and contemplating again, one should perform works in deeds. Contemplating and contemplating again, one should do works in words. When you, Râhula, are about to do a work in deed, in word, in thought, you are to contemplate that work thus: 'The work I am about to do, could it lead to harm to myself, could it lead to harm to others, could it lead to harm to both, an evil work, ripening suffering? If you, Râhula, contemplating thus realize: 'This work that I am about to perform would lead to harm to myself, would lead to harm to others, would lead to harm to both, ripening suffering', then you, Râhula, should not perform such a work to the best of your ability. But if, Râhula, contemplating thus, you realize: 'This work would not lead to harm to oneself, would not lead to harm to others, would not lead to harm to both, a good work, capable of joy, ripening joy,' then you, Râhula, have to do such a work.

All the ascetics and brahmanas, Râhula, who in past times have purified deeds, purified words, purified thoughts, have all purified them thus: contemplating and contemplating again. All the ascetics and brahmanas who in future times will purify deeds, all will purify them thus: contemplating and contemplating again. All the ascetics and bhikkhus who purify deeds at present, all of them purify them thus: contemplating and contemplating again. Therefore, Râhula, contemplating and contemplating again, let us purify thought-work; thus, Râhula, you have to practice well."

As in everything else Buddhism occupies a special position within the spiritual life of mankind, so also with regard to falsehood. All other religions, insofar as they work with the idea of transcendence, i.e. insofar as they are religions of faith, work with the necessity of the *pia fraus*, the religious lie. If they reject this necessity, i.e. if they claim to be a rational-scientific religion, then they are no longer a religion at all; for religion is only that which points beyond and leads beyond this sensual reality.

Buddhism points beyond this sensual reality and leads beyond it and thus carries the constituents of religion within it. As a doctrine of reality, it can also be processed into a religion, just like philosophy and moral teaching, but it also retains its character of reality as a religion, which is demonstrated by the fact that it does not require the *pia fraus*, the religious lie. A Buddhism that needed pious lies to exist would not be Buddhism. Buddhism is ultimately that which teaches us to be free from lies in every form, from the common lie as well as from the ideal lie. The fact that we have to pay the price of life itself is not the fault of Buddhism, but the fault of reality, which cannot exist without *pia fraus*: on the other hand, this also shows how closely lies and life are intertwined, so closely that one cannot be separated from the other. Where life is nothing but nourishment, complete, through and through nourishment, the lie is not a stain that adheres to the outer garment and can be removed from there, but there it is, like every other kind of imagination, a living imagination, an inner formation that keeps the game of nourishment going, because it is this game itself.

With such insight, there is only one remedy against lies: "contemplating and contemplating again", i.e. the fight against empty concepts, against imaginations, however pious, however ideal, however useful and productive they may appear.

Buddhism is what frees us from lies. It does that, and it frees us from addiction. It frees us from addiction because it frees us from ignorance; it frees us from ignorance because it succeeds in freeing us from bias. We want to look without bias, we want to examine without bias, we want to keep without bias - with this decision, everyone who is serious about the truth should go in search of the truth. In this way he will cut off the head of the lie. Not even in the service of life shall you lie! If this was said, it was said for that reason.

Veneration him, the teacher!