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Meanderings of the Wheel of Dhamma

A Comparative Study of some Buddhist Missions

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I

I want to discuss with you today [1] the contemporary missionary activities of Buddhists to the western world. In order to do so intelligently, it will first be necessary to establish the essential missionary nature of Buddhism, both from its own internal dynamics as found in the Pāli *suttas*, and also from some historical observations. We shall be using as paradigms the classical Buddhist missions from India to Lanka, China and Tibet.

We shall then consider what happened to Buddhism in Lanka under foreign influences, touching both upon some very negative aspects, but also on some bright spots of revitalization in the persons of Colonel Olcott, the Anagarika Dharmapāla, and others.

Some modern anthropologists these days talk about what they call a 'pizza effect'—when some aspect of culture is exported and then re-imported. We shall apply this theory to the case of Buddhism in order to discuss the emergence of Buddhist missions to the west during the past several

decades.

Finally, using classical Buddhist missions as a model, we shall discuss the contemporary missions. Our thesis is that in the past, Buddhist missionary activities have been conducted in a dialogical method. It has not been so simple as one culture teaching Dhamma to another; rather, we have seen remarkably creative, cooperative efforts in which both parties brought to the task their own unique heritages and perspectives We shall conclude with an appraisal: that many of us, oriental and occidental, do not fully understand the implications of this dialogical type of mission , and that Buddhism could not take firm footing in the west unless a true dialogue is entered upon.

II

The disciples of the Buddha are called *sāvakas,* from the Sanskrit root (√ *sru,* to hear. What these disciples heard from the Buddha was a radically new way of dis-solving the multilemma of our existence, which is called *saṃsāra.* The Buddha's Dhamma was radically new to the extent that it uncompromisingly and single-pointedly focused on the unsatisfactoriness of human existence (*dukkha*) and taught a method (*magga*) for its resolution, without resorting to extraneous and counter-productive theorising in support of

the teaching. This was as puzzling to his disciples at the time of the Buddha as it is to us today, but somehow the Buddha employed language, metaphor and myth in a philosophically unentangling way, teaching in full regard of the person whom he addressed.

The idea of a *sāvaka,* a hearer, is not a passive ideal; it is a most active one. 'Hearing' the Buddha's message entailed some action, usually telling others what has been heard. A strong parallel to the Buddhist notion of 'hearing' is found in the Christian notion of a 'witness,' which does not mean an inactive seeing, but also compels the believer to a certain type of action. Thus the early Buddhist 'hearers,' like the early Christians, were *ipso facto* missionaries.

Why?

Many reasons for this could be adduced, but to mention just two:

In the first place, a large emphasis of the Buddha's teaching was the development (*bhāvanā*) of such ethical states (*vihāra*) as *mettā, karuṇā muditā* and *upekkhā,* which could be approximated in English by love, compassion, empathy and equanimity. One method conducive to the dis-solution of saṃsāra (*nirodha*) was precisely the *bhāvanā* (cultivation) of these attitudes. So on the way to the solution of our problems, we find that a very keen awareness of the sufferings of others is developed. Very simply, we desire to help them. And the way to do that was to make available to them the Dhamma, that indispensable raft for crossing over

from pain to bliss.

Another reason for the essential missionary nature of Buddhism is its claim of universality. Much of pre-Buddhistic Indian religion was a loose confederation of local cults. This is true still today. These cults were primarily tribal or regional in nature, and one finds local deities and rituals predominant in all regions of modern India, save the most urban. No tribal god would assure *svarga* (Pāli *sagga*, heaven), which was the goal of these religions, for someone outside of the tribe. Therefore the soteriological import of these religions was ethnically and tribally limited.

The Buddha, of course, vehemently rejected all such practices. One of the first five *saṃyojanāni* (fetters) with which one must grapple is the belief in the efficacy of just these tribal religions: *sīlabbataparāmāso.* [2] The Buddha rejected more than just caste (*jāti*); entailed in his rejection was the denial of all cultic, fetishistic, shamanistic and tribal religious practices, as these were under the purview of the *brāhmaṇa* (priestly) caste. In this context, the Buddha's teaching was precisely the negation of the teachings of the localised religions. It could not be bound to any particular language. (This might not seem so remarkable today, but we must remember that in India, Sanskrit was considered eternal, extant before even the gods.) Further, he commanded his disciples to learn many dialects to teach the Dhamma; [3] its validity extended beyond the reaches of the Magadhi tongue. In fact, it was extended to all the world, and even to worlds beyond this sector of *kāmaloka,* the realm

of the fivefold sense-desire.

In summary, there are many reasons for the essential missionary nature of Buddhism, but we have selected two for our discussion: (1) the cultivation of such ethical states as mettā, karuṇā muditā and upekkhā; and (2) the universality of the Buddha's teachings, as evidenced by Buddha's repudiation of localised religions and languages.

III

The history of Buddhist missions began during the life of the Buddha himself. Of course, he is the missionary *par excellence,* and his disciples were instructed to follow his example. But the exporting of Buddhism began with the establishment of a Buddhist-oriented government during the reign of Emperor Asoka during the third century B.C.E. The role of Asoka in these missionary activities is well known here in Lanka; he sent his nephew, a bhikkhu and arahat, Mahinda, to convert the local king of Lanka, Devānampiya Tissa, at Mahintale. The occasion of their meeting is remembered in Lanka at the Poson poya [4] day, and it appears that these first meetings were instances of Mahinda instructing the Singhalese about Dhamma. But in the *Samantapāsādikā* [5] we find an interesting point made by Mahinda. The king asked him whether Dhamma had been

established in Lanka, and Mahinda replied that while it had been introduced, it did not yet have deep roots. Mahinda's claim is that the Dhamma could be considered deeply rooted only when a Singhalese had received *upasampadā* [6] in Lanka, mastered Dhamma and Vinaya here, and was able to teach. I would see in Mahinda's sage reply the following crucial distinction: That one-way missionary activity might serve to introduce Dhamma, but only true dialogical meeting could establish it. Mahinda was not merely appealing to Singhalese pride in his admonition. He was pointing out that Dhamma can take root only when it becomes thoroughly internalised by a culture, which is expressed in his insistence on a Singhalese being able to learn and preach Dhamma in his homeland.

Dr. M. M. J. Mārasinghe also has looked with fresh eyes into Mahinda's missionary work and found that Mahinda's teachings were fundamentally adaptations of the Buddha's teachings which were suitable for the religio-cultic climate of Sri Lanka. [7] He points to Mahinda's adoption of pre-Buddhistic cultic practices such as tree-worship, still found in the veneration of the Bo-tree in Lanka, Yakkha cults, which remain with us in tribal ceremonies, and ancestor worship, which would explain why Mahinda's first public preaching was of the Petavatthu.

When we say that Mahinda taught an adaptation of Dhamma to suit the climate of Lanka, we do not mean this to be taken in any pejorative sense. We shall see that this was also the case when Buddhism was transported to

China, to Tibet, and in every other successful mission. We shall also offer that this is what has been and will continue to be, in its journeys to the west. However, let us return to Lanka.

Buddhism continued its process of absorption into the fabric of Lankan culture for several hundred years, reaching the culmination of this process in the commentarial tradition of the Mahāvihāra and Anurādhapura. As you well know, Buddhaghosa and his colleagues were able to set the philosophical standards for Theravāda Buddhism by writing authoritative commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*) to the Tipiṭaka. What we would offer is this: that in writing the commentaries, a certain trend of thinking found in the Tipiṭaka was selected and elaborated, a thread which, for reasons as yet undetermined, was found suitable for the intellectual climate of classical Lanka. This thread was quasi-realistic (some recent scholars have underscored this point and claim Buddhism to be an "empirical" or "scientific" religion) and intellectual [8] as opposed to mystical or symbolic. We want to re-emphasise that we do not see this as a divergence from original Buddhism, but it is unquestionably an adaptation. Certain threads of thinking found in the *nikāyas* [9] are taken up and elaborated, others are relatively neglected. And this process is the result of the dialogue between the Indian bearers of Dhamma and the Lankans who accepted it and made it their own, uniquely their own.

Let us consider two other instances of successful Buddhist

missions—those to China and Tibet.

Perhaps the most instrumental individual in the introduction of Buddhism into China was Bodhidharma, an Indian meditation master who is considered the First Patriarch of the Ch'an (Zen) school, during the fifth century C. E. Now one word must be inserted about the role of 'founders' in Buddhist missions: There never is any one person responsible for the export of Dhamma from one country to another, and there never is any one event, time or location where or when it happens. Buddhists, however, traditionally like to believe that there was—hence the great reverence paid to Mahinda, Bodhidharma and Padmasambhava in Sri Lanka, China and Tibet respectively. Buddhism came to China long before Bodhidharma did. It came via the silk routes, from Gandharan (northwestern) India, through Kabul, Bamiyan, Samarkand, the Gobi oases of Khotan and Kucha, et cetera. Likewise, it has been demonstrated clearly that Buddhism was found in Lanka before Mahinda. [10] But tradition piously attributed to these charismatic leaders the sole responsibility and praise for these missions. Perhaps this was due to their acceptance by the royal courts of these countries, but this properly is the topic for another paper.

Bodhidharma taught Dhamma to the Chinese, and he was an Indian. But the Chinese genius modified and adapted Buddhism to their needs, and the Ch'an school was not fully developed to its present form until several centuries later, during the time of the Patriarch Hui-neng. These

modifications continued, and it was later re-adapted by the Koreans and the Japanese. The east Asians took some threads of Buddhism and wove a unique fabric. They were more practical-minded than the Indians and less philosophical; hence Zen's non-reliance on texts and philosophy. They were more naturalistic, and they brought nature imagery, largely borrowed from Taoism, into their Buddhism. They were also never quite happy with the teachings of *dukkha* (suffering) and *anattā* (egolessness), or with the emphasis on monastic discipline (*vinaya*), so they adapted these ideas as well, and developed a more idealistic and practice-oriented form of Buddhism. Certainly the trends emphasised by the Chinese are present in the Tipiṭaka, as are the realistic and intellectually-oriented form of Buddhism in Lanka. Our point is that the introduction of Buddhism into China was also a dialogical process, a co-operative effort of Indians like Bodhidharma and Chinese like Hui-neng.

In Tibet we find a similar story. Tradition reports at least three major waves of missionaries from India: that of Padmasambhava, that of the *mahāsiddha* lineage focusing on Nāropa and Marpa, and that of Atisa. Of course there were other contacts with Buddhism: some from the silk routes and possibly quite early; and the traditionally revered two Buddhist queens, one from Nepal and one from China, of seventh-century king Srong-tsan gam-po (Srong. brstan. sgam. po.). Padmasambhava's mission is most fascinating to historians of religion. [11] In this case, the great *tantrācārya*

was invited to Tibet by King Srong-tsan gam-po at the suggestion of Acārya Santirakṣita, a saintly intellectual. Padmasambhava was a more dynamic sort, and the hagiographical traditions surrounding his life bear constant images of his subduing local deities and demons, which have been interpreted as his sublimation of the shamanistic religious energies of pre-Buddhist religion in Tibet. Most western scholars pay close attention to the more miraculous aspects of his life, and, fascinating though they are, Tibetans equally revere him for the establishment of the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet at Sam-ye (bSam.yas.). He also wrote many treatises on meditation and yoga which are still highly popular today. Like Mahinda in Lanka, he is revered as a 'second Buddha' [12] because of the dialogical nature of his mission, one which dealt with Tibetan culture in its own rights adapting Dhamma to suit the needs of the Tibetans. It is well known that nowhere has Buddhism evolved such unique social and cultural permutations as in Tibet, with such institutions as the Dalai Lama and other tul-kus (*sprul.sku.*), who are considered manifestations of various aspects of Buddhahood, recognised as such at a very early age, and brought up on a strict monastic regimen of Dhamma and Vinaya so that they were most able to lead the Tibetan people both spiritually and politically. Tibetan Buddhism largely draws from the source of mystical and symbolic threads of the Tipiṭaka.

IV

Even from such a cursory look at three major Buddhist missionary movements, I would like to emphasise again that the success of such missions has depended on the cultural sensitivity of the missionaries from India and their genius for adaptation, as well as the creative acceptance of Buddhism by indigenous peoples in Lanka, China and Tibet, an acceptance which entailed a making of Buddhism into their own religion. Without these dialogical underpinnings, I offer that these missions would have failed and that Dhamma would never have spread beyond India.

Now I will ask you to hold this point in mind while I bring another perspective to bear on the issue of Buddhist missions, this one borrowed from modern anthropology. Although the name for this phenomenon is rather light-hearted, the concept itself is quite serious it is called the 'pizza effect' and this theory was developed by Professor Agehananda Bharati, chairman of the anthropology department at Syracuse University. [13] I shall first relate to you the paradigm of the 'pizza effect' and then show its application to the case of Buddhism.

Several hundred years ago, the most common midday meal of working class people in Sicily and parts of Italy was the pizza, which is a kind of flat wheat cake covered with tomato sauce and perhaps some cheese. It was not very

much like the pizza of today, if you have had the joy of eating one, but a rather plain dish as common as boutique rice and curry here in Lanka. It was popular because it was the cheapest thing one could eat.

Between two and one hundred years ago, millions of Italians migrated to the United States, bringing with them their own form of Christianity, their language and, of course, their eating habits. Like most people who emigrated to America, their economic status rose sharply, and this was reflected in their food: their humble pizza became adorned with all sorts of delicacies like sausages, anchovies and extra cheese—all things far beyond their economic reach in Sicily and Italy. More slowly back in Italy, economic conditions rose also. Now, the cultural genius of America is synthesis and improvisation, and while their American cousins embellished their pizzas, the Italians, now able to afford meat and pasta, gave it up entirely. Twenty years ago a pizza could not be found in Rome, so thorough was the working class rejection of their previous poverty and the accoutrements of poverty— including the pizza. So it seems that pizza, like millions of Italian workers, simply migrated to America from Italy, gaining a bit in the process.

But that is not the end of the story. As economic conditions rose, international travel became available to both Italian-Americans and to Italians. And what happened was that Italians visiting America enjoyed pizza so much that they took it back with them—sausages, anchovies and all. The end of the story is that the pizza is again a favourite in Italy,

but in a form embellished from its humble ancestor of the working-class lunch.

This is what Bharati calls the 'pizza effect': when a cultural form (in this case the food, pizza) is transported to another cultural milieu, all but forgotten in its original home, then re-imported to the original matrix, usually with added embellishments.

What has this to do with Buddhism? Plenty, especially in the case of the Theravāda.

During the imperialist period, Lanka suffered greatly, and no aspect of culture suffered more than Buddhism. I need not remind you of the legal sanctions against Buddhists under foreign rulers, and the decadent state it was in about one hundred years ago. But something else was afoot. Buddhist texts were 'discovered' for the West by scholars like F. Max-Muller, T.W. Rhys-Davids, Lord Chalmers and Henry Clarke Warren. These scholars were following in the footsteps of a great reformer of the Sangha and Buddhism, the Venerable Welawita Saraṇaṅkara Saṅgharāja (1698-1778), whose arduous work in collecting *ola* [14] manuscripts in Lanka is as admired by Theravāda saṅghikas as it is unknown to western scholarship. These were among a vanguard of western Orientalists who took these texts to Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard and edited and published them, making them available to a larger audience than perhaps ever before. Then such revitalizers as Henry Steele Olcott, the Anāgārika Dharmapāla and Theosophists like

Madame Blavatsky, in effect, brought these texts back to Lanka and re-energised a slumbering Buddhism. Of course Olcott's interest in the Buddhist revival in Lanka was stimulated by western newspaper accounts of the famous Panadura Debates (1871), in which the rival claims of Buddhism and Christianity were publicly examined. Olcott, therefore, did not start the Buddhist revival; rather he was an early and extremely influential—especially in the field of public education—participant in it.

A re-emergent Buddhism played a large role in the independence movement in Lanka, just as did Hinduism as interpreted by Mahātma Gandhi (who, incidentally, first read the *Bhagavad Gītā* in London in English) and other leaders of the so-called Hindu Renaissance. What I would like to point out to you, as I'm sure you're well aware, is the influence of these revitalists on the shape of Buddhism in Lanka today. Probably many of you learned your Pāli in the English rather than the Singhala script, and I would hazard a guess that there are more P.T.S. editions in your homes than ola manuscripts. This is not to imply that you owe your Buddhism to westerners—far from it! But to some extent you owe it, in the form it now bears, in English-educated circles, to this 'pizza effect', even though such Ceylonese as the Anāgārika Dharmapāla and Ānanda Coomaraswamy probably had more to do with it than Mr. & Mrs. Rhys-Davids and Lord Chalmers.

What does all of this add up to? I hope that it indicates what I have been emphasising all along: the dialogical and trans-

national character of Buddhist missions. The Singhalese accepted Dhamma from Mahinda in their own unique and vital way, just as Lanka will continue to embellish upon the revitalised Buddhism of Olcott and Dharmapāla. If this is in any way unclear, consider the unique and, as some suggest, heterodox teachings of Dr. Ambedkar in India, whose millions of Buddhist followers have developed a new social Dhamma, largely under the influence of Gandhiji and the Hindu Renaissance, which was under the leadership of such western educated and influenced men as Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekānanda and Gandhi himself, who in turn gained their inspirations from the likes of Sir Edwin Arnold and F. Max-Muller. Neither Hinduism nor Buddhism ever died in their home countries, but their vitality had been severely sapped by centuries of European imperialism, and for the transfusion of new energies into these religions, such a radical anthropological phenomenon as the 'pizza effect' was in order. We shall continue to apply the 'pizza effect' in the context of contemporary missions shortly.

V

Given this much of an historical and anthropological background on the subject of Buddhist missions, I would now like to consider the present Buddhist missions to the

western world. By Buddhist missionary activities in the west, I do not mean mere scholarly pursuits. What I mean by a Buddhist mission is a serious attempt to lead people of another culture to accept refuge (*saraṇa*) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha and to live a Buddhist life. Additionally, these missions have as their goal the conversion of large numbers of people, not merely a few intellectuals and artists, to rightfully be called missions.

Given this somewhat limited range for the use of the word 'mission,' I think we can safely agree that Buddhist missions to the west are several decades old at the most. One very interesting thing about these missions is that they are 'three-pronged'—that is, they involve Theravāda missionaries, Mahāyāna, especially Zen, teachers, and Tantric or Vajrayāna missionaries. In this sense they are unlike any previous missions in having three distinct forms of Buddhism involved. (To some extent, this was also the case in the introduction of Buddhism to China and Tibet, but to a much lesser degree and certainly without so much conscious cooperation among the differing Buddhist systems.) There are some special problems which arise due to this heterogeneous missionary activity, many of which revolve around a thorough misunderstanding of the notion of *ekayāna,* or 'one vehicle,' which shall be taken up a bit later.

Theravāda missionaries have been active in America and Europe for about four to six decades. Presently we find Theravāda *vihāras* in Washington and London, and one can

see European and American bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs residing in Lanka, Burma, Thailand and India for about the past seventy five years. Much of the interest in Theravāda Buddhism centres around vipassanā meditation practices which have been made popular in excellent books by Nyanaponika Mahāthera [15] and by Professor Donald K. Swearer of Swarthmore College. [16] Current interest also revolves around Abhidhamma as a form of psychology, and some researchers have been attempting to lead to an integration of some Abhidhamma techniques and concepts into western psychological therapeutic systems.

Zen Buddhism made its way into western culture through the so-called Beatnick movement of the 1950s, led by such popular figures as Jack Kerouac, Alan Watts and Allen Ginsberg who, through their novels, essays and poetry, introduced some Zen ideas into western parlance. All of them were deeply indebted to the work of the Japanese scholar, Daisetz T. Suzuki. One can find Zen meditation centres in almost every major western city, and I know of one full-fledged Ch'an monastery in San Francisco. Major retreat centres are found in New York, California, London, and other areas, and some psychologists, such as Dr. Eric Fromm, have been taking a very keen interest in Zen as a psychological technique. At least two of these major Zen centres are currently under the leadership of American roshis (Zen masters), and I find this quite significant. The Japanese roshis have become confident enough of their transmissions to name as successors their leading western

disciples. One is reminded here of Mahinda's advice regarding the status of Dhamma in Lanka: that it was firmly established only when the Singhalese themselves could learn and teach Dhamma in their own country. This appears to have happened in the case of Zen in America.

At this juncture I feel compelled to offer a criticism of Theravāda missionaries. While it is undoubtedly the case that more Westerners have been ordained as Theravāda bhikkhus and nuns than of any other form of Buddhism, I know of very few western Theravāda members of the saṅgha living in the west at this time. It seems that nearly all of them choose to remain in the more spiritually accommodating atmospheres of Lanka, Thailand and India. This, I feel, is a neglect of their duties to the western upāsakas and upāsikas. If the Theravāda is to gain a strong foothold in the West, it seems absolutely necessary that western Theravāda saṅghikas live and teach in the west. No number of Singhalese monks or western upāsakas can fill the void left by the absence of western Theravāda saṅghikas, and I would call upon you to remember Mahinda's message in this context.

The Vajrayāna is the most recent form of Dhamma to make its presence felt in the west, and this has been due to the tragic invasion and takeover of Tibet by the communist Chinese about twenty years ago. Several thousand Tibetan refugees were accepted as immigrants in America and some European countries, and many thousands more have arrived since that time. Presently they seem to be making

more impact and gaining more converts than any other form of Dhamma, as there are several Vajrayāna monasteries in the west—in New Jersey, California, France, Scotland, Colorado and New York—with resident Vajrayāna bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs of western origins. Further, many Tibetan tul-kus have been teaching meditation to westerners in large numbers, and many thousands of westerners have taken refuge under them. There are Vajrayāna meditation centres in nearly every major western city, and the Vajrayāna teachers themselves have been showing some parallels between Dhamma and psychology to the west.

Several crucial questions regarding these missions confront us, and I would like to pose three:

1. Is a saṅgha necessary for Buddhism to flourish in the west?
2. How should the westerner view the great diversity of Buddhist systems? Are they in accord or contradiction? Are they in fact identical or complementary?
3. What of Buddhism is essential and what is dispensable? How much of it need be transported to the west, and what of it is mere cultural accoutrement that should be left in Asia: or at least modified to suit western needs?

As for the first question, the role of the saṅgha: It is undoubtedly the case that the saṅgha has been indispensable in all ether instances of successful Buddhist missionizing. We have already lamented the paucity of

occidental Theravāda bhikkhus resident in the west, and we call upon Buddhists in Asia to send us back some of our own teachers. But we should also point out that many Buddhist teachers feel that the monastic ideal is not suitable for the modern western world, and that Buddhists should concentrate on teaching meditation to the laity. Only time will tell the correct answer to this question, but I would offer that if we study previous Buddhist missions and take them as a guide, then the role of the saṅgha looms large indeed. Remember the crucial task of Padmasambhava in establishing the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet at Sam-ye, and remember Mahinda's admonition about the importance of a Singhalese receiving *upasampadā* in Lanka and teaching Dhamma himself. (Such a ceremony was held last year in London.) This is certainly one of the questions for which dialogue is crucial.

The second point also needs some perspective. The history of Buddhism has seen literally hundreds of different schools emerge, each with its own conceptions and practices. I should point out that Lanka is the only Buddhist country in history which actually set up a sort of governing body at the Mahāvihāra in Anurādhapura which dealt with doctrinal questions authoritatively. All other Buddhist countries seemed content with the peaceful co-existence of varying systems of Dhamma. On one hand, we must admire the Mahāvihāra for preserving the oldest recorded teachings of the Buddha in a relatively authentic form. On the other hand, we cannot agree that all the rest of Buddhism is a

degeneration from this standard, as the alpha and omega of Dhamma is *bodhi* (enlightenment), and other systems seem to do equally well in teaching this subtle transmission. Certainly America is quite comfortable with diversity, and we cannot envisage any parallel institution like the Mahāvihāra arising in the west.

Many pioneering western Buddhists, such as Christmas Humphreys, have sought to reduce Buddhism to the barest minimum, to get at what is essential and discard the rest. Colonel Olcott tried something similar in getting all Buddhists to agree to some fourteen cardinal points of Dhamma. But these fourteen points could not be said to encompass Dhamma, save as a basis for discussion among Buddhists themselves.

In such Mahāyāna texts as the *Srīmālāsūtra,* [17] we come across the Buddhist technical term *ekayāna*, which could be translated literally as 'one vehicle.' Now one problem in popular treatments of Buddhist technical terms is that they are often treated out of the original context in which they arise, often leading to some misleading notions of proper application of these terms. A superficial interpretation of *ekayāna* might come down to the claim that one should find in Buddhism what is common to all forms of Buddhism, treating the rest as inconsequential. This term, especially in the more mature Mahāyāna writings of Bhāvaviveka, Santirakṣita and sGam-po-pa, is used to convey the idea that while conceptions, methods, et cetera, may differ widely among schools, *nibbāna* is still *nibbāna*, and that all schools of

Buddhism lead to that same sublime goal—to dissolution of *saṃsāra* and the attainment of peace of mind. In this sense alone can there be said to be one vehicle: from the perspective of ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya* in Mahāyāna terminology). From the relative point of view or *saṃvṛti-satya,* there are many Buddhist systems. But the point is that this diversity is a richness, not a lack, and that diversity of method (and the Mahāyāna sees all teachings as *upāya,* method) exists because there is diversity of individuals who need different methods. Rather than try to reduce all of Buddhism's beautiful flowerings into one homogeneous and rather unappealing soup, a Buddhist should point with pride to the different methods his religion has to offer its adherents. The diversity of Buddhist systems yields an ethereal harmony, and perhaps it would take Buddhists from America, a nation firmly rooted in diversity, to remind other Buddhists of this key point.

The third point admits to many different approaches. Some Buddhist teachers in the west feel that Dhamma can be translated directly into any cultural matrix with no loss of substance. This would seem to follow from the Buddha's admonition to teach others in their own language. **[18]** Others are a bit more cautious, and feel it is necessary for a western student to learn traditional Buddhist canonical languages and even spend some years in traditional Buddhist cultures. This is a difficult question, and its resolution could only be reached by the dialogical method. One approach that certainly would not work would be for a

Buddhist teacher to insist that his whole cultural baggage be accepted along with Dhamma; that is, a western Buddhist need not accept yakkhas and exorcisms, although these are integral parts of the observable religious life of Buddhists in Lanka. Nor need a westerner learn to perform the tea ceremony or study karate to understand Zen, although these are aspects of Japanese cultural impact. The stance called for here is one of the middle way. Buddhism never lives apart from the cultural contexts in which it is found; yet never has an entire cultural tradition been transplanted in an alien soil. I am suggesting that we need to find an American Buddhism, suitable to that country. And the finding of this Buddhism will emerge only from a long and sustained dialogue between Dhamma teachers from Asia and Dhamma hearers in the west.

Parenthetically, I want to mention that occasionally I am astonished by how much of culture seem transportable. One aspect of Tibetan culture which I had always thought could survive only in Tibet was the notion of a tulku, which as we mentioned before is the discovery of a child as an embodiment of some aspect of Buddhahood. I was very surprised to read recently that one of the highest lamas (*bla.ma.*) of Tibet claims to have discovered an American tulku, and that the child is now being raised according to the centuries-old Tibetan tradition of Dhamma-education. [19] I am reminded by this of Mahinda's comments on the firm establishment of Dhamma in Lanka.

Let me return again to the 'pizza effect.' What occurred in

the case of the re-importation of Buddhism to Lanka (and also with the Hindu Renaissance in India) was that a watered-down, intellectual form of Dhamma emerged among certain classes in these countries. Pamphlets were written about how Buddhism was not a religion at all, but a philosophy. I would offer that nothing could be farther from the truth. Buddhism is a religion in the very best sense of the term in that it aims at a radical transformation of the person. May I remind you that the avowed goal of philosophy (in the western sense) has been merely intellectual clarification, and while this may play some role within Buddhism, the Buddha himself disparaged such activities as tending not toward the goal. [20] The goal is *nibbāna,* and this goal is fully religious. This overly-intellectual attitude found in some circles in south Asia today is, I feel, one of the undesirable by-products of the 'pizza-effect,' as is a superficial understanding of *ekayāna.* If Buddhism is advertised as so dryly intellectual, it will never succeed in the west, which is quite fed up with mere intellectualism.

VI

It is very difficult to appraise the missionary activities of Buddhists in the west. There is no doubt that Dhamma has

been introduced there, but one cannot say whether or not it has taken firm root. We are blessed with many great Dhamma-teachers there, as well as some good students. I would ask you, as a major Buddhist organisation in a respected Buddhist country, to take seriously my observation that Buddhist missions are successful only insofar as they are dialogical, and I would ask that this dialogue we have undertaken today be continued in the interests of Dhamma. I hope that one day we will all recognise an American Buddhism, which of necessity will be different from Singhalese or Chinese or Tibetan Buddhism, but which will unquestionably be 'Buddhism' in the very best sense. As the great Buddhists of classical Lanka, China and Tibet did, we must adapt as well as adopt Dhamma and make it our own. [21]

Notes

1. This paper is a revision of an earlier draft read before the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress on the occasion of the Twenty Fifth Anniversary of the United States Educational Foundation in Sri Lanka, 19th November, 1977.
2. Saṃyutta Nikāya, P.T.S. edition, V, p. 61.
3. Vinaya Piṭaka, P.T,S. edition, II, p. 139. For a discussion of the Singhalese controversy regardirg the interpretation of this verse, see Etienne Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhism indienne: des origines à l'êre Saka*, Louvain: Publications Universitaires, Bibliothéque du Musêon, Vol. 43, 1958, pp. 610-614.
4. *Poya* is Singhalese for the Pali word *uposatha*, referring here to the Full-moon day of the Poson month. These uposatha days are devoted to religious observances by monks and laity.
5. *Samantapāsādikā*, P.T.S. edition, p. 60.
6. *Upasampada* is the higher ordination of a Buddhist monk as a full-fledged Bhikkhu.
7. M. M. J. Mārasinghe, "'Functional' Buddhism of Sri

Lanka. A Mahindian Adaptation from Original Buddhism," Colombo: *The Buddhist, Vesak Number*, May 1977, pp. 9-11.

8. The intellectual emphasis of the Theravāda was underscored in the first century C. E. by the *ganthadhura*, *vipassanādhura* debates. While these two methods of learning and meditative insight are not viewed as antithetical in Theravāda literature, the primacy of an intellectual comprehension of Dhamma is a distinguishing mark of the Singhalese Theravāda. Of course, meditation has always been vital, as in any form of Buddhism. For a more polemical discussion of those debates, see Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura Period*, Colombo: M. D Gunasena & Co., 2nd edition 1966 (1956), pp. 159-160.

9. The Nikáyas are the Collections of the Buddha's Discourses, as preserved in the Pali Canon.

10. B. W. Adikaram, *Early history of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Co. 1953 (1946), p. 48.

11. See Keith Dowman (tr.), *The Legend of the Great Stūpa and the Life Story of the Lotus-Born Guru*, Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1973.

12. Lynn A. de Silva, *Buddhism: Beliefs and Practices in Sri Lanka.* Wellawatte: L. A. de Silva, 1974, p. 161: *"anu buddha."*

13. While I have heard Professor Bharati lecture on the

'pizza effect,' I cannot recall where he has written about it.

14. Ola manuscript: a text written on strips of palmleaf (*ola*), which are then bound into books.

15. Nyanaponika Mahāthera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. London: Rider, 1962.

16. Donald K. Swearer, *Secrets of the Lotus*. New York: Macmillan, 1971.

17. This important text has been fluently translated by Alex and Hideko Wayman, *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srīmālā: A Buddhist Scripture on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press. 1974.

18. *Vinaya Piṭaka*, P. T. S. edition, II, p. 139.

19. Lindsay Miller, ''A Tibetan Holy Man Reborn in Massachusetts," *New York Post*, August 16, 1976, p 33.

20. Majjhima Nikāya, Cūla-Mālunkya sutta No. 63.

21. The author wishes to express his appreciation to the Ven. Nyanaponika Mahāthera for valuable discussions and suggestions regarding this topic

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