



The Wheel of Life

An Inquiry

by

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When one is shown a picture of the Tibetan Wheel-of-Life with its six divisions and are told they represent Hells, Monsters, Beasts, Men, Titans, and Devas, one may accept such a picture as true, symbolical, mythological, or otherwise. Or one may, in the spirit of Sir James Frasier, go on a journey of discovery. Such a journey, alas and yet rejoice, could take one into many lands, lands both of this world, and this world as of the past, and in lands of the spirit, so to speak.

One finds, upon inquiry, that the Wheel-of-Life is different in various Buddhist lands; there the number of divisions is not stable. Sometimes it is identified with the Wheel-of-the-Law, or Dharma-chakra, and sometimes it is distinguished. And if this is not enough, one is faced with further aspects of inquiry. For if one accepts the norms of Buddhism at all, then one should try to avoid the ordinary analytical methods. Or, semantically speaking, we can, to some extent, get a map of a territory, but can we get a map of a map? And may it not also be that we can get the territory and do not need a map at all? This Zen answer is being avoided even though, in the end, it proves to be the only true, or fruitful, or pragmatic approach.

Already we have made an assumption. The Buddhist came to offer “arya dharma” which has two distinct, though not contrary translations: “the wisdom of the Aryas,” and “the Perfect Way.” Hindus also accept “arya dharma,” though with different interpretations. The terms translated above as Hells, Monsters, Beasts, Men, Titans and Devas, or Gods, may be loose and only slightly appropriate; yet they are translations from the Sanskrit, and all of them are found in some places in Sanskrit literature.

To put it otherwise, “naraka,” “preta,” “titharga-yoni,” or “raksha,” “manusha,” “asura,” and deva,” are just six of the many terms found in Indian traditions. One or more of them has been used to describe inhabitants of certain regions. Sometimes they are place names, sometimes they are terms of reproach; they vary in objective meaning. And while they tend to become fixated in metaphysics, that is not always so. The full investigation of these words and associated terms would require a book, not a paper.

While we are looking at these terms there is also a danger of attaining to a fixed gaze. The fixed gaze in itself may either become crystalline or sterile. Thus, in the first place, we find Hindu philosophers proclaiming that man has five vehicles which we translate as physical, vital, mental, intelligence and bliss-bodies. Each of these bodies or approaches has its complete “world.” Man has some control or awareness of each and all. Yet, in writing books and giving discourses there is a tendency to adhere to the mental or manushic state. This may give a very good (or a very bad) mirror-view. When it comes to grasping the universe, it may prove to be inadequate.

Not so inadequate are the efforts to master the various stages of meditation, whether these are known as “jhanas,” following Theravadin Buddhism, or “dhyanas,” following Mahayana Buddhism. There have been many discussions of the relative merits of these divisions. These discussions have the dangerous tendency to omit, to some degree, the practice of meditation, and, to a much larger degree, the results of the change in personality as it comes through skill in achievement.

If “I,” at any time, am given a theme, and in the pursuit of that theme “I” grow in personality, outlook and consciousness, the final “I” is not the original one. This is good Buddhistic teaching and it has come into the Western world as “semantics.” But in the review of the subject, if one adheres to

the same outlook at the end as at the beginning, it is the “outlook,” not the complete view which is being presented.

In addition to that, Buddhism, in general, proposes such experiences as “samadhi,” “prajna,” “karuna,” as well as “dhyana” (Sanskrit terms will be used henceforth for obvious reasons.) So it may be asked: is this outlook the result of samadhi, or of karuna, or of dhyana, or of some sort of skillfulness? Or is one continuing to use the analytic section of the mind to present some picture of the universe which is either not totally real, or somehow beyond the range of ordinary consciousness (manushic level)?

Finally, what kind of logic is being employed? In Buddhism there are various levels of logic, and they may be irrefutable. This is suggested both from the standpoint of those who believe that the logic is in some way connected with the experience of nirvana; and those who accept the broad views expressed by the late Professor Cassius Keyser of Columbia with this teachings on doctrines. It would be a very bold assertion to come out forthright and claim wisdom for all the elements discussed so far, but if criticism is in order, it is to the effect that the last word will not be out until one has something of a cosmic view.

Dr. Malalasekera has given us some excellent translation of Pali, and by inference, Sanskrit terms. To speak of the solid, fluid, heating and vibrating dhatus instead of earth, water, fire and air, makes it possible to bridge the immense and perhaps artificial gap between the universe of Oriental philosophy and the universe of science. Here it is boldly asserted that there is one universe; that very often the same discoveries are made by devious methods; that the same principles or laws have been found, but worded differently. Presuming that one can enter into attunement or samadhi with a tree, may he not find some of the same things that the scientist discovers by his labored inquiries? Presuming that nirvana is samsara, may we not find that the gas laws, entropy, isotopism, fission and fusion phenomena, the unceasing search for equilibrium and the basic findings of physics, as well as its brother, son and daughter sciences, may come to the same truth?

The study of Mauryan and Amaravati art shows that at one time everything in the universe was pictured as in circles. The same is true of the folklore of India. So the wheel was important. But are all wheels identical, or are there differences? If the wheels are identical, where is there room for evolution, and how are we going to escape some form of atma? May it not be that the winding zikkara is preferable to the pyramid with six or seven levels? May it not be also that the overall picture of Borobudur presents a winding, circular, evolutionary universe leading to a supreme Buddha?

With such in mind, one makes his inquiries into the Wheel-of-Life and discusses a few of the possibilities, not with any degree of finality, but with the hope that further researches may bring forth more fruit. By further research, however, one means here not alone exploits and explorations in archaeology, mythology, religion and arts; but also explorations into that vast universe scaled by dhayna, or by samadhi, prajna, or any and all upaya which takes one out of the egoistic outlook.

The statement has often been made: “nirvana is samsara.” According to the principles of modern logic, e.g. Russell’s theory of types, this has no meaning. The term “is,” which may be an equivalent of “equals,” does not apply to infinitudes. These are not equal or unequal in the same sense as two parts of an algebraic or finite equation. This is a misapplication of language and is one reason why the school of Logical Positivists considers all metaphysics as nonsense. But is it nonsense? And who is to decide that?

The great fallacy of the logical positivist is that he claims to speak for “science,” which is a transfinite term, finite but unbounded. Who can speak for it unless he has a fairly complete understanding of all “science,” a rarity. Scientists, individually, do not always reach the same conclusion. Thus, one quotes here from *Essay in Physics* by the famous Herbert A. Samuel:

“Quiescent energy is conceived as a continuum, and as the sole physical constituent of the universe. All material events are to be accounted for as cases of the activation of quiescent energy. Being quiescent, it is undifferentiated, and produces no phenomena. It cannot therefore be perceived, or defined, or described, and nothing can be located or timed by reference to it.” p. 51

Our thesis here is to indicate that this universe is one, whether it is verbalized as the universe-of-science, the universe-of- metaphysics, the universe-of-samadhi, or any other “universe.” That the Buddhistic terms are not nonsense. They have been derived from an all time-pervading Hinduism, which in turn may have derived its terms from an ancient totemic society (“Australoid”) or from its sacred literature, its propagandists or, more likely, from all of them together. In Buddhism there was an attempt to give each term a pregnant meaning. This position will be held, though the possible efforts of explanation may be found novel, or even untenable—yet they are possible paths to the unification of human knowledge, that of “science” and “arya dharma” in particular.

In “Udana” one reads:

“There is, O Bhikkus, a state where there is neither earth, nor water, nor heat, nor air; neither infinity of space, nor infinity of consciousness, nor nothingness, nor perception, nor non- perception: neither this world nor that world, both sun and moon.”

This does not seem so far from Lord Samuels. But in “Udana” one also finds:

“There is, O Bhikkus, an unborn, un-originated, uncreated, unformed. Were there not, O Bhikkus, this unborn, un-originated, uncreated, unformed, there would be no escape from the world of the born, originated, created, formed.”

One can interpret this passage in such a way as to find a connection with sankhya teachings. One can also perhaps, in another manner, find a parallel in Plato’s chthon and anti-chthon. This leads immediately to the possibility of two wheels, an eternal wheel, and a wheel of change. It is the wheel-of-change, with its divisions and evolutionary propensities that will be discussed.

The Wheel-of-Life may be discussed along with the Tree-of-Life. The wheel is a circular device, with linear cross-sections; the tree, both actual and sometimes symbolical, is a linear device, with circular cross-sections. The ancient Semites employed the tree. Jesus said: “I am the vine and ye are the branches thereof.” He was crucified upon the tree (Hebrew “etz”). The tree has also been used by scientists, from Linnaeus on, to symbolize the positions and relations between plant and animal phyla and sub-phyla, etc.

The very existence of the wheel, whether as a toy, utensil or property has been a cause for wonder to anthropologists. There are several possibilities for its usage. Thus, there are people who think in circular terms. The universe has been pictured as a circle or sphere. The idea of a reoccurrence, eternal or not, is found in many parts of the world. It has even penetrated into many literary forms such as the Panchatantra, and from India has spread out to China, on the one hand, and the Islamic world on the other. Thus the “Arabian Nights.”

In the true Hebrew Kabbalah, which has not been taken very seriously, the deepest mysteries of religion are said to inhere in “Ma’aseh Barashith” and “Ma’aseh Merkabah,” the mystery of Creation and the mystery of the Chariot. The former appears in the book of Genesis, the latter chiefly in the book of the Prophet Ezekiel.

The chariot of Ezekiel involves two completely different sets of symbols: (a) the four elements, which also appear in the mandala-symbology and tattvas of Hindu esotericism; (b) the wheels. It is not widely known that the Kabbalists hold (in contrast to “occult” semi-investigators) that their wisdom was derived from the Hindus. The apparent difference between the Tibetan and Hebrew wheels here is that the subdivisions of the Hebrew wheels are also wheels, not “houses” or “kingdoms.”

The kabbalistic commentaries on creation also hold that barashith really stands for bara shith, or rather, “he created six.” The idea is upheld that the creation was divided into six sections, or six heavens and one earth. This is not so far from what is found in lands further east. And traces of this remain in the Tarot symbols which have come down to us to this day. Perhaps this number, “six” is pregnant, perhaps finding it in some widely different areas is a coincidence, perhaps there are variable interpretations.

But the picture one gets thus far is that there may be a transcendent, changeless wheel, and a wheel of transformation. It is this wheel of transformation that one discusses here. Even at that, there is a third possibility, such as is suggested by the little known French theosophist, Fabre D’Olivet. He proposes three, not two aspects of the universe:

- a. A timeless-changeless but living Essence he calls “Providence”
- b. A time-changing order of fate, karma, compensation he calls “Destiny”
- c. An interweaving, evolutionary order he calls “Will”

The wheel-of-destiny or karma is pretty universal. We find it among many nations. William Simpson, an early investigator into Buddhism has written *The Buddhist Praying Wheel*, which discusses it at some length. But even he omits such things as the myth of Hercules and Omphale.

Hercules, in his lion-skin visits Omphale, who seems to have been Queen of Ethiopia. While with her, they often changed garbs, Hercules putting on the women’s robes and operating the spinning-wheel, Omphale donning the lion-skin. Fabre D’Olivet translated Hercules as “lord of the universe” and Omphale as “mother of the divine voice.” Actually, Hercules is Bodhisattva, proved by his labors and even more by his ability to take the world off Atlas’ shoulders. He is not subject to the wheel of karma, but he willingly takes it over (incarnates), puts on women’s clothes (a physical body) and lives in Ethiopia, which is to say in Hebrew “Cush,” the land of fire.

All of the above might have been better amalgamated, but on page 275 of *The Buddhist Bible*, at the end of the section on the Surangama Sutra, one reads from the footnote in italics:

“Chapter V is devoted to a mythical description of the Seven Realms of Existence and is omitted.”

One wonders, just what did Dwight Goddard mean by “mythical?” Perhaps if we had it, it might throw some further light on any picture presenting a universe with six divisions, and either the whole, or one in the center counting as a seventh.

Jelal-ud-din Rumi, the great Sufi poet wrote:

“God slept in the mineral kingdom, dreamed in the vegetable kingdom, awoke in the animal kingdom and realized Himself in man.”

In Sufism it is taught that there are three lower kingdoms of mineral, vegetable and animal, and then three stages or planes within man. These three planes are called “nasut,” “malakut” and “djabrut.” They correspond pretty well, if not identically with the Sanskrit “sthula,” “sukshma” and “karana.” These, in turn, are translated into English as “material,” “subtle” and “causal.” These translations are not exact and suggest possibilities which may not be true, ultimately. In any event we have the idea of three higher and three lower, and these have been symbolized in Judaism as the six-pointed star. This also appears in Hinduism, even in most recent times. (The parallels between Judaism and Hinduism are enormous, hardly investigated, but will not be referred to further.)

The wheel also appeared as the first pictorialization of Buddha. In this it rather paralleled the fish as the first pictorialization of Jesus Christ. The turning wheel may have been derived from revolving fire-brand; in this event it would not have had “houses” at all. Attempts to establish a finite number of houses have ended in a failure. In different parts of the Buddhist world we may find a five-sectioned, six-sectioned and even eight-sectioned wheel, but even other numbers are found in remote lands.

The difficulty to be encountered in fixing the number of houses or kingdoms within the wheel comes because the authorities responsible have not had the suitable experience to know within themselves what is true. Perhaps we may find in Zen Buddhism a reflection of the dharmachakra which is beyond the realm of words and things. But in Shingon we have reflections of the sounds; sounds which are characteristic of the divisions and subdivisions of the universe. As it is out of place here to discuss the “mysticism of sound,” one can just point to it.

Sanskrit is a discursive language well-fitted to the manushic activities of mind. When one reaches the next stage, that of Vijnana—following the Upanishads—he may become verbose. This explains, in a sense, the works of such philosophers of the day as Bhagavan Das and Aurobindo Ghose. It may, in a sense, point out why Avatamsaka is so long. When one rises above that, there are such scriptures as Udana and the Prajna Paramita Sutras. Some of the greatest Sufi poems (mystically) are very short.

But artists may dispense with words. In Chinese art we find several “good” methods for conveying super-ideas. In Southern Buddhism the best, in certain respects, is the theme of “parinirvana.” There are some Chinese representations of parinirvana which are really poor art, but marvelous “metaphysics,” if one wants to employ this term. For when the Buddha was dying, representatives of all the kingdoms of the universe drew near and joined in the lament. There they are shown outside the wheel, as independent personalities.

A reflex of this comes in some of the deeper experiences, when one finds a unity with portions of the universe to which he is not attuned in the ordinary ego-state. There is the denial of the ego so as to make a nothingness of it. It seems as if the Sarvastivadin school almost followed this course. But there is another denial because, as the true “self” is realized, either one finds naraka, preta, etc. within himself, or becomes so attuned to all the levels of the universe that he seems to be within them, and perhaps they within him.

Here one may quote from Takakusu:

“Often samsara (‘constant flow’) is translated as ‘transmigration of the soul,’ but that is a very misleading translation, for the idea is not that a soul lives after the death of the body and moves into another body. Samsara means the creation of a new life by the influence of the actions of the former living being. In the first place, Buddhism denies the existence of the soul. Life is like the waves on water; the vibration of one particle causes the vibration of the next particle, and thus the waves are transmitted a long distance. One wave is one life, and the series of lives is ‘samsara.’ In Buddhism the series of lives do not go on infinitely, as in a straight line. They turn in a circle and repeat the circle over and over again. The Wheel of Life is a small circle of one life, while the great circle (the series of the Wheel of Life) is samsara.” p. 35

Professor Suzuki has been setting up a dichotomy between *vijnana* and *prajna* and aimed his shafts at Hindu philosophy in general. This sets a dangerous precedent. For if we study Takakusu (and others) they present the details of various schools which establish some sort of existence for “elements.” No doubt this idea originally arose in primitive Buddhism, but there are two dangers involved:

The first danger is that in positing the existence of forces, one assumes that forces and beings are different. This is an assumption and it is very doubtful whether it can be reinforced by any activity of *prajna*. It also comes very near to establishing certain groups as real (or unreal), when these same groups reappear as coordinate in the divisions of the Wheel-of-Life. If gas, heat, energy, sublimation and physical processes are real and the ego is not real, where does the mind come in?

The next difficulty which appears in all the “Conditional Mahayana” schools is that they confuse “catalogue” with “category.” This is especially true of *akasha*. *Akasha* is almost universally an abstraction or a concept so far as the role it plays. But if anyone has experienced or attained any of the “wisdom of the Upanishads,” he will know that this is not so.

The extreme of this comes when *nirodha* and *tathata* are listed as elements, or otherwise. This would certainly be fallacious according to Lord Russell’s logic. In fact ultimately, unless there is a revision of some aspects of Buddhist metaphysics, these would run afoul not only of Russell and Tarski, but even more of Buddhist logic, especially the *ji-ji-mu-ge* universal outlook.

When the *Roshi* who succeeded *Shaku Soyen* visited San Francisco, he was especially emphatic in his denial of speculation of all sorts. So far as literary reports are concerned, it may be difficult to delineate between mere speculation, “sound” speculation based upon some type of logic or experience, actual application of *prajna*, or perhaps, the attainment of enlightenment verbalized to convey something to the less informed.

The universal outlook may be difficult. It may be insufficient without some degree of enlightenment. But when we are concerned with “universal” and “universe,” it may be that all differences, even some discussed above, are verbal and not fundamental.

With this preparation we pass to some precise considerations.

Naraka

No doubt there is a great deal of confusion in translating Indian words into the presumably corresponding terms in European languages. This word is translated as both “hell” and “purgatory.” Because a decision is made, another outlook will be discussed.

The three lower rungs, kingdoms, or divisions of the wheel in the Tibetan pictorialization are naraka, preta, and raksha (or tirthaga-yoni). These terms correspond to the three hells of Emanuel Swedenborg, but Swedenborg holds consistently to a “soul” or “self-entity.” The three lower divisions in the Sufic categories are the same as those of common sense, and perhaps we can add some science to it viz. the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms. The Sufis say that these kingdoms are within man; we can find the mineral worlds in the bones and teeth, the vegetable in the hair, and the animal in the body, generally. This substantiates “evolution” in a certain fashion.

It would be difficult to reach any positive conclusion as to whether the mineral world has a psychic counterpart. Jagadis Bose demonstrated that metals showed fatigue. The work of this great scientist has been bypassed. Today the West has come, independently, to many of his conclusions due to the very pressing fact of airplane catastrophes. Again and again these demonstrate that metals do have fatigue and even something akin to dis-ease.

The popular difference between the Buddhist hells and the Christian hells is that the former were of “ice,” the latter of “fire.” The very principle of coldness shuts out the possibility of purgatory in its philological sense. But the interpretation of samsara given above equally shuts out the idea of any eternity being involved. The law of karma, or compensation, shuts out the possibility of any “infinite” reaction to any finite series of acts, no matter how terrible these may be.

Some Oriental Christians, it is true, abhor “eternal hell” or even any hell. The corresponding Arabic term is naar, and it is even possible that this was a borrowed term, although it may have another Semite derivation which would mean the absence of light. However, the folklore traditions concerning naar bring it much closer to Naraka than to any Christian term.

Eternal punishment is foreign to the Semitic mind. The Greek tartaros can be interpreted as the piling of earth-upon-earth, or darkness-upon-darkness, which is the Qur’anic explanation. The hell of the absence of light (Islamic) is not so far from the hell of the absence of heat (Buddhist). However, with the discovery of phosphorescence, radioactive emanations, etc. which derive from prakrit, the Buddhist approach is much more in accord with science.

If nirvana is samsara, if all is in each, then even in the “lowest world we must find some correspondence to “love,” “wisdom” and even enlightenment. But the fact that minerals do have certain forms of light is evidence of the latter. And their love appears in adhesion, cohesion, and gravitation, not to mention other terms. Furthermore, the mineral world possesses the wisdom of stillness. “The hills stand mute, but how they speak of God.”

Buddha has been pictured as sitting in meditation in an icy cave. This is one way of showing that nirvana and samsara are identical. But when we touch upon the idea of absolute coldness, i.e. the absence of heat, we run into some very strange types of physical phenomena. And it should be noted here that many of the wonders of the world become apparent when heat is diminished, pressure is diminished, light is extinguished. We can, in a sense, call these states “naraka.”

Things are not created; they come through destruction of some sort. The nearest approach to “things” in the primordial world are gems and oolites, and even they may have been the outcome of forms of physical activity. Philosophers do not realize this. When they rush in to point to chairs, tables, etc. they are selecting very complicated derivatives fashioned from the prakrit-stuff of the universe by the intervention of mental and physical forces.

The absence of these forces brings us “hell.” There, there is the diminution of love and compassion. There, there may be darkness. There, there may be solitude. There, there may be a minimum of activity. When a person is afflicted with paralysis or paresis, though he is “alive,” he experiences some of these things. He is in “hell.”

The whole physical universe can be studied with a view of finding parallels to spiritual- or wisdom-teachings. The laws of gasses, the laws of change of state, the Lorenzian explanations and the whole doctrine of relativity, perhaps the whole gamut of phenomena may present similitudes of what appears in Oriental literature. So our Naraka is not unreal. We can picture it as a certain aspect of nature. Put man there and he feels he is in bondage.

The laws of thermodynamics, especially the second law called entropy, offer a final parallel. This proposes that heat only moves in one direction, from a warmer body to a colder one. It seems to be the one irreversible law; it suggests that everything is seeking equilibrium. It suggests that everything either is not, or does not desire to be different. The non-ego could have no such inclination. This universe of nature, of prakrit, may now be considered in a new light. The Naraka of Buddhism and Hinduism may be the “lowest,” but only in a certain sense. It is not separate from the universe as a whole.

The Pretas

The pretas are pictured as horrible creatures. They are shown as huge in body, having enormous appetites and insatiable thirst. They can hardly be satisfied for they have very small mouths, quite insufficient to assuage hunger and thirst. They are often spoken of as “hungry demons,” or even “ghouls.” They are created by the karma of desire and lust. They may be regarded as creatures of another world.

The Greeks had something of the same idea for they pictured one of the denizens of Tartaros standing in a pool of water which receded whenever he lowered his head; with branches of grapes above him which rose whenever he turned aloft. The Greeks also had the idea of nemesis, or compensatory faith.

While the immediate impression of the preta may be one of horror, when we turn to the world of vegetation we find that some of the largest trees around us are fed through very, very small mouths. For our great conifers do not depend so much upon their anchor roots as upon the very tiny feeder roots. There are two sources for their nourishment, one being in the leaf-chlorophyll, where the sugars and starches are first manufactured. The other source of materials comes from the roots and rises up through the xylem structure.

If we follow our Upanishad teaching, we can see the formation of a vital body (pranamaya-kosh) in the plant. It breathes, but breath does not seem to be all-important. Oxidation in the mineral

world changes the form entirely; in the vegetable kingdom and beyond, oxygen has, perhaps, quite different functions. Indeed the functions of phloem and xylem in plants correspond pretty well to the functions of purusha and prakrit in the universe.

In the plant world God dreams, so to speak. The Naraka-world is one of dreamless sleep and in this it is the reflex of the highest condition, or rather the deva-state. The preta condition is the reflex of another state which here, it will be proposed, is that of the genius, gandharva or overman, and not of the asura.

The evolution of the vegetable has its own pattern. Cells multiply by division. This makes it difficult to determine whether there can be any ego. Cells combine and we find, in the lower forms called lichens, a type of communalism, as if all the cells had a common life, though one is not sure as to whether there is a common body.

Man enters the preta world when he is forcefully enticed by dreams. The psychoanalysts, who followed Freud, and even Adler, seem to have overlooked the possibility of dreams caused by stomach-hunger or from overeating. There are also factors connected to the gasses given off by the body, or even from atmospheric pollution of any kind.

In the dream-states man generally loses his willpower. When he descends to the level of drug-addict, he really vegetates. He does not move; he lies down and dreams. He is enveloped in dreams and at first seems to enjoy them. Then he becomes their slave. He is inert. The tamasic factor so dominates him that both rajas and sattva seem to have disappeared, for practical purposes. Thus the opium-pipe, marijuana, and all narcotics lower the threshold of his consciousness and keep him at a low level.

There is another type of preta-hell which envelopes man. That is when he is at the mercy of creatures or forces which seem to behave like these beings and feed on his body or mind. We speak of diseases associated with germs and other organisms. Some schools of medicine even give them causal ability. In any event, they are present when the disease is present. The two disappear together.

Many people in "primitive" stages would say that the body is then subject to a "spirit." There have been many possibilities for an explanation of this term "spirit." Even in the last few years, highly trained medical men have observed that the Amerindian medicine men could often diagnose and even cure people by methods quite outside of their ken. The medicinal systems of Islam, derived in part from Galen, also use some similar principles. Here we enter into complications outside the field of this paper.

The metastasis that we find in cancer also suggests a preta-disease. Then it would seem some foreign body bodies are feeding on the patient. There are psychic possibilities here which have not been fully explored. There are also facets and factors which come close to what has been known as "obsession."

The conceptions of hell that place them in the future overlook the full propensities of karma. In the so-called fourfold Law-of-Causation, nothing is said about time-periods or time-lapses. Pain and pleasure are constant pulls with us. And we cannot understand any type of punishment or degradation is so full of the immediate temporal possibilities. The science of the day is fast approaching an understanding of the anatta position. When we place fixed punishments for fixed sins in fixed times,

we come back to the Christian and Aristotelian positions. They do not belong in any serious consideration of arya dharma.

Rakshasas

There are many references in the Vedas and other forms of early Indian literature which invoke this term. It seems to be implied it is generic, and it also seems to suggest that these creatures have some sort of "animal-soul," i.e. are near to the animals in evolution. In Buddhist art the "sins" are symbolized as beasts. But the term "raksha" was also used by propagandists against "enemies of the state."

There were, of course, good animals and bad animals. Thus, the monkeys assisted Rama in his war against Lanka (Ceylon.) It is probable that the Ramayana is filled with symbolism. But either for reasons arising out of totemism, or for quite different reasons, the Malay peoples have often been referred to as "monkeys." And it may be that the early Hindus were known as rams, the Judeans as lions, the Egyptians were cows or bulls.

Astrology still uses such symbols as Capricorn, the goat-fish and Sagittarius, the horse-man. Nor are these far apart from the divine symbols of ancient Babylon. So we do not always know when the Hindus employed such terms as raksha, yakcha, tirthaga-yoni, etc., whether they were variations of totem-names or derisive terms corresponding even to our "imbecile" and "moron," or had other meanings.

In any event, the raksha seems to possess the "animal-soul," to be able to breathe, make sounds, etc. In some respects, it seems to be a sort of animal-of-the-subtle-world. Love in this stage may be called lust, though that is slightly unfair. Sex appears in the vegetable world, but there the "consciousness" is dormant. Growth appears in that world and intelligence manifests as "tropisms." Among the animals it is called "instinct," but that is a very rough term applied alike to the mass suicide of lemmings and the homing instincts of bees and pigeons. Someday, perhaps, the operation of intelligence through the nervous (and other) systems of the body may be traced and the processes better understood. In other words, there are deep roots of karuna, prajna, and dhyana which penetrate through all beings, of whatever order, both among their own kind and in response to "higher beings."

Someday, perhaps, the various teachings about breath will be better known in the world. Someday, perhaps, the intellectual scholars will have at least an inkling of the mysticism and metaphysics of sound. When that is so, a relationship will be ascertained between the characters of birds and indeed of all the animals and the sounds they make. There are sounds caused by wings and there are sounds deep down like the purring of cats, the croaking of frogs, and all the types of "music" of birds, as well as other animal sounds. The qualities and tones that go into these sounds form "languages," and while we have ascribed knowledge of these "languages" to myth and fable, it is possible to learn more about them. This has already been done to some extent by biologists.

Moral qualities appear in animals. They cannot be judged by human standards. In the first place, we find the appearance of some sort of "ego," and there are many grades and gradients of ego-consciousness. The swarm, the tribe, the family, the flock and many groups seem to operate as if they were one individual. So it is with the rakshasas. They have not reached the state of develop-

ment of will. Animals can be cruel, dirty, ruthless and so rakshasas seem to have been. Also those tribes of human beings who seemed to behave so to the more advanced Hindus, Aryan or not; often they were confused with rakshasas. Do we not call some men “wolves?”

There might be rakshasas by choice and rakshasas by karma. They may represent stages in the evolution of being on the tree- or the wheel-of-life. Aurobindo indicates that beastly men are, in a sense, rakshasas. Hindu astrology has divided people into rakshasas, manushas and devas, and more or less identified them with the operation of the gunas.

Many diseases seem to indicate rakshasic conditions in men, either when they behave like animals, or exhibit subhuman qualities or characteristics. Fevers, rages and mental disturbances are examples. The drunkard also has sunk down to this state.

The rakshasas seem very much like the demons or imps found in Western Europe, and even the gargoyles are in this class. So long as we operate in limited consciousness we cannot be too sure of the distinction between fact and fable; in this world the lines seem drawn. Perhaps in other parts of the universe they are also drawn, and drawn quite differently.

Those who have had certain types of psychic experiences may have contacted rakshasas. Thus the banshees. People who have lived in the West Indies are quite conscious of psychic forces around them and also of “ghosts” and “goblins.” These seem to have contacted earth although not exhibiting a gross physical body. But the existence of creatures other than those accepted by Western science is universal. We can only hope that fancy and fact will draw closer together.

The Asura

This is a very complicated subject. Here history, prehistory, symbology, mythology, spiritual teachings and traditions meet. The Tibetan representation of the Wheel-of-Life places the asura between the deva and the human. On top of that, the term is translated as Titan. What does a Titan mean? And what evidence is there that it is a translation, or even a substitution for asura?

Our first difficulty here is that those who have not experienced nirvana or even samadhi are attempting to explain, sometimes in detail, intricate parts of a Buddhist pantheon or a Hindu cosmology. There is talk of Mahayana and Universal Mind. Then, at the next moment, we have the establishment of discrete genera, almost on an Aristotelian plan, as if the universe were made that way. If the terms of the Tibetan pantheon are not real, if they are mythological or symbolic, they represent abstractions or derivatives and cannot be taken too seriously. On the other hand, when one finds that the terms are derived from a Hindu cosmic psychology, one has a right to inquire whether the terms are borrowed. Or whether, as in some Mahayana Sanskrit writings, the terms are appropriated either in their original sense, or because they prove to be fitting vehicles for the expression of the wisdom gained because of one’s superior outlook; e.g. Vasubandu.

The book of Genesis mentions presumable intercourse between the “sons of God” and “daughters of Adam” whence the nephilim and gibborim. Both of these are Hebraic terms for some kind of being, perhaps superior to mankind. But these beings were not necessarily of earth, or entirely of earth. They have been identified with the Grecian Gigantes or Giants, and with the Titans. But who

were the Titans? They appear to have been leaders of some race that was overcome by the Greeks, who invaded southern Europe as Hellenes, or children of light.

There have been two entirely different suggestions for the origin of the word "asura." If the terms have been confused, it may have been accidental and it may have been intended. For example, "asura" could have referred to Assyrian. Now, although we associate the words "Syria" and "Assyria," it is only in a limited sense that the "a" in the latter is a primitive syllable.

The word Syria seems to be identical with the Hindu "surya" which is, to say, the sun. (cp. sol, helios, etc.) But the land of Syria today is called "Shams" in Arabic, which is also "land of the sun." Hindus of some kind undoubtedly lived in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley where they were known as Kassites. The Hebrew variants are Chushim and Chashdim, which terms, as well as Chaldoi, mean fire-worshippers. They also appear as the Mitanni, which term is, following the esoteric traditions, identical with the Midianim of the Bible.

To such people the Assyrians may have been enemies. But the term Assyrian in Semitic speech is identical in meaning with Aryan in Indo-Germanic speech, both signifying nobility. The wars in that part of the world led to divisions in both "races," and finally to the split between the Iranian and Aryan peoples which resulted in some diametrically opposed interpretations of mythological terms.

If we read ancient Sanskrit literature or the dharma sastras or even were acquainted with such moderns as Sokei-an Sasaki and Aurobindo Ghose, we would find that the asura is placed between raksha and man, and not between man and deva in cosmic evolution. The "a" is primitive and the word means "those without light," "the lightless," "the creatures of darkness." If the rakshasas are like banshees or imps, the asuras can even be like devils, for they possess minds and a degree of willpower. But again, the asura may be a creature between animal and man in the sense that he is underdeveloped, not fully conscious. If one accepts avidya as identical with sin, the asura would not be unregenerate so much as not completely evolved. The Sufi tradition rather agrees with the Indian position.

Following this we might see that wars, struggles, debates, conflicts, dualistic philosophies and aggravated polarization of any sort show the asuric position. It would also connote man in ill-health, ill health of body, mind or emotion; one suffering from any one of a multitude of non-epidemic diseases, from malnutrition, auto-intoxication or actual intoxication. Thus there would be imbalance in coordination. All of this followed because the asuric presumably possesses tamasic and rajasic faculties but is lacking in sattva.

Interpretations of a Dantesque or dualistic sort are really unfit for Buddhist terms. They not only bring confusion, but passed from lip to lip and heavily impressed in writing, they produce impressions in distant lands which establish barriers between these people and the actual Buddhists. To begin with, there is no valid reason why the Tibetan pantheon should be derided and the Tibetan mythology or symbology uplifted; or why, if the wheel is accepted according to Tibetan art, the stupa is not equally accepted.

There are realms which still belong to psychic investigation; there are studies into the many values and meanings of earth, air, fire and water. There are a thousand factors which remain unclear unless one takes a straight course or adheres to a particular school to obtain explanations. Eclecticism will not work.

Manusha or Human Stage

This does not always appear in the wheel, and sometimes the whole wheel-of-life is presented as being “within” man, either within the individual or within the totality of humanity.

However the wheel is pictured, man is placed in the middle; either man in the middle of the wheel, or the wheel in the middle of man, or both. This is also in accord with the universal occult traditions. Thus we have the story of One-Eye, Two-Eyes and Three-Eyes. The mother loved One-Eye (the subhuman) and Three-Eyes (the superhuman). Yet it is Two-Eyes that married the prince; so it is the human, not the one-eyed raksha nor the three-eyed deva, who can enfold the universe.

Man is the measure of all things and the creature of maya. The root “man” signifies mind or thinker. This, in turn, seems to be derived from the root “ma” which means to measure. Man stands, so to speak, between heaven and earth. He is so pictured in the Tarot symbology; he is also so pictured in ikebana. Ordinarily this means the mental man, the thinker, the analyzer.

This is Enos, son of Seth in the Bible. He is a creature “in the image of God” with all potentialities. Therefore, Buddha came to awaken, not to teach; to awaken those dormant potentialities, to bring man to realize what he is.

In the Bible man possesses the ruh and neshoma as well as nephesh, which last he shares with the animals. In Hinduism he is the carrier of akasha, whence the other tattvas flow. Thus it has been said of him, “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.” For it is the Holy Spirit which brings deliverance from the wheel, which spirit does not belong to the lower kingdoms of creature.

This man, placed in the middle, is stationed above all those mentioned, but below the gandharva and deva levels.

Gandharva or Genius

In placing this group between man and the deva, and in substituting it for the so-called “Titan” or “asura,” in some explications of the Tibetan version of the wheel, one goes contrary to certain traditions. There is always a difficulty when a territorial-man faces a map-man; in between is the maker of relief maps. The latter, although he has not and cannot grasp the whole territory, gives us a much better picture of it than the map-man conveys. Maps are based on peculiar geometries and psychologies, both of which are ignored when we look at the ones on the wall, less ignored when we examine a globe.

The positing of a universal-mind or a Buddha-mind and a faculty called “prajna” is of no avail when one receives unconfirmed traditions without regard to one’s experience. Sometimes the levels of these traditions may be quite “low.” Unless they are passed down by a dharma-stream they are of very doubtful validity.

The acceptance of many kinds of “Buddhist learning” through translations and philosophical commentaries of philologists does not always convey the true essence of dharma. A man like Alex Wayman revolts at the impressions thus conveyed to the Western world. A man like Nicholas Roerich builds up tremendous institutions with glamour and presumable power, to find them fall like

a house of cards, utterly ignoring the possibilities both of prajna and karuna. A Mrs. Rhys-Davids builds up widely accepted traditions which few would dare to confute and then at their peril only to knock it down herself and present quite different approaches. Therefore, it is not out of place to challenge (within the limits of the doctrine-of-doctrines as proposed by Cassius Keyser) any traditions not backed by a sangha, or even a sangha (like some of the extreme sects of Tibet and Japan) which operate as if there were no historical Gautama Buddha, and that emancipation was not necessarily the important thing.

Out of the mass of Buddhist traditions that have come to us, one alone will suffice for the purpose of this paper. Avatamsaka-Sutra, dealing with the illumination of Buddha says:

“Innumerable Bodhisattvas, Devas and Genies were assembled around the Unique Honored One of the World, and inspired by his miraculous power; each celebrated His merits in a song.”
Page 64 *The Buddhist Sects of Japan*, E. Steinhilber-Oberlin

We have innumerable passages in Buddhist writings which deal with cosmic evolution and give clarifications which do not always fit in with the Tibetan categories. That they extend beyond those of the Hindus is due to their assumption that they possess the true dharma, which does not stop, even with the five bodies mentioned in the Upanishads (though it would be hard to prove that sambhogakaya is totally different from anandamayakosh.) The terms sramana and sravaka are used. Originally they applied to those who accepted the path in some form. Mahayanists tend to call southern Buddhists sravakas. The term sramana fits in very well with overman. Both Inayat Khan, the Sufi, and Aurobindo Ghose, the Integral Yogist, propose two stages above manusha; the former used the term genius and angel-man, the latter, overman and superman. For the rest identity persists.

Great discoveries, great inventions, great advances in art and culture came from or through “minds” which have quickened faculties. True inspiration is not ninety percent perspiration. The discoveries of Newton, Darwin, Wallace, Faraday, Herz and the Curies did not result from just trial-and-error detailed struggles. Today as we read reviews by scientists who, after long laboratory experience, have an overall view of techniques, methods and ascertained knowledge, we find them greatly differing from logicians and philosophers who presume to review their works, but who have not had the experience or discipline. The same is true of those who would delve into “inner worlds.”

Analysis has its limits, logic is circumscribed, but the mind goes on. In trying to synthesize the knowledge of the day, Professor Oliver L. Reiser of the University of Pittsburgh comes to such daring conclusions as this:

“... there is a ‘cosmic ether,’ but this cannot be detected by experiments within the system.” p. 301, *The Promise of Scientific Humanism*.

He then adds (*italics his*):

Evolution is not yet through with the human organism, for still higher functions remain to be developed. (ibid. p. 302) He ends this work with the thesis of “The New Alchemy.” Although synchronized to Professor Jung’s work, he looks forward instead of back.

There is something common in great geniuses which materialistic schools of psychology cannot grasp. Why a Beethoven? Why suddenly a Carlyle? Why a Tchaikovsky, a Copeland, a Rupert

Brooke, an R. Rolland ? Why a Leonardo, a Dali, a Westinghouse, an Einstein, a sudden mass manifestation of great engineers? Reiser comes to "global thinking." His advocacy of alchemy may shock his colleagues.

The natural tendency of the gandharva is to sing and dance. His feelings are finely developed. This type of mind sways towards the arts and sciences. What little we know of the pituitary body indicates that it has two lobes or divisions; if one is developed, we have the thinker—if the other is developed we have the feeler-doer.

The sramana was not only a lay Buddhist, but one who belonged to the stage of over-mind. It was this that made Borobudur possible. A few years back, when the Dutch government sent for engineers to make repairs there, they failed. They called in devotees; after a period of meditation, they knew exactly what to do and the repairs were made, and made, according to reports, perfectly.

The practice of meditation by itself may bring one to an appreciation of this state. In "The Quest of the Oversoul," Paul Brunton explains the way of the breath, the way of the heart and the way of the eye. These can only be grasped partially by intellectual examination and reflection. But when one who has direct experience, or knowledge steps forth, he either has difficulties in trying to express himself in common language, or he runs up against that type of mind which has tried to act as a sort of Suez Canal between East and West. Even broad tolerance does not bring true understanding.

It is possible to write at great length on these ways of breath, heart and eye, or even on meditation, but this would take us away from our examination of the wheel. Professor Sorokin of Harvard has already conducted experiments and does some remarkable research into the fields he associates with the term "supra-consciousness." The supra-conscious has aspects which correspond, on the one hand, with the genius-gandharva-sramana and on the other with the deva and mystic. In our age "inspiration" begins to take on semantic meaning.

The Devas and Devaloka

There may be a difficulty here as the word deva has been translated variously as angel, god, shining one, etc. Sometimes it appears as a categorical term; sometimes as a dualistic term, deva vs. asura in India, with the opposite roles being assigned in ancient Iran. The Greeks had their universe of gods, demigods and heroes, all of whom were creatures of light.

The deva and angel are particularly associated with music. The music of the gandharva may be simple or complicated. Only in India has there been a continuous tradition of it. But the deva and angel have struck deeper chords in the human heart. The song-birds, and in particular the dove, possess notes, and even musical types which are of a devic order. Here the heart plays a dominant role.

In Islam the angel is pictured as having no "soul" in our sense of the term. If so, one is not sure whether the deva and angel always mean the same thing. It has been explained that the word "deva" is a sort of catch-all term for the very highly developed (in the sense of being super-material, if not supra-conscious). In Buddhism, the deva is not free from karma or samskara or samsara. There is always the possibility of his "falling," the case of one or two traditions the West draws from the Bible not being considered unique.

Generally harmless, kindness and lovingness seem to be part of their nature. Yet in function even the great gods of Hinduism do not always appear to be greater than the archangels of Israel. From the Islamic standpoint, Vishnu and Shiva cannot possibly be identical with their Allah, but rather with their term "Rassoul," which means a messenger, and is equated with "Avatar."

All the goodness and kindness in the world does not assure one of freedom from bondage. This is an underlying current in all religions, especially when considered from the esoteric or mystical standpoint. Good qualities lead to rewards; ego-retention leads to further activity. Thus, even the heavens can become bondage. They do not belong to ultimate eternity.

Buddha did not go into long arguments about the existence of the gods. He accepted them whether they may have been thought-forms, guardian angels, cosmic spirits, or actual rulers of the seen and unseen. There is strong evidence for the existence of hierarchies, but these cannot be proven by ordinary, or even some extraordinary methods. Ultimately, the protection of the universe devolves upon those who have been called Bodhisattvas.

The Bodhisattvas

Although in one sense the Bodhisattva is one who has escaped from the wheel, in another sense he is one who has become identified with it. We are here in a field with, perhaps, such a variety of explanations that it is presumptuous to select one and say it is the true one. We can point to traditions. It is quite certain that many of the "virtues" which the Northern Buddhists attribute to this term fit the southern "arhat" quite well. It is equally true that the failure to find a sufficient number of coherent referents, i.e. persons who have attained to this state, suddenly places us outside of any direct mythology or psychology. Of course, this is also outside of categorical expression. It is only mentioned because it is one, maybe one of many, terms which can be assigned to these personalities who have overcome all obstacles and stand forth as ginas, or world-conquerors.

This is only an inquiry. It suggests directions which may be investigated further. It indicates that in a world of rapidly changing knowledge—individual knowledge and mass knowledge, greater historical and scientific knowledge, and even greater understanding of the hitherto "unknown," the categorical-symbolic method of representation needs some supplementing.

Samuel L. Lewis (Daruma)