

Das Buddhistische Haus

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Redeeming Insight

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People divide themselves according to their view of life into those who see this life here as a given and final value and those who see it not as a final but as a provisional value and thus as something from which one must and can be redeemed; in other words, they divide themselves into those who feel at home in life and those who feel alienated from it and long to leave it. From this basic division, we must try to become clear about the nature of religion. Religion must be that which encompasses both of the above-mentioned possibilities. The historical facts contradict the idea that anyone who does not work with the idea of salvation is excluded from all religion and religiosity from the outset. The whole of China would then have to stand outside religion, because the Chinese mind in its original way of thinking does not work with the idea of salvation. For him, the world and life are something into which he finally and forever belongs, a well-ordered system in which the inner relationships correspond to the outer ones, a cosmos, a real human world, a world for humans, a world that carries meaning (the Tao) within itself, a world that has meaning because it is meaning itself.

The idea of God as something that stands outside this world and from which it first acquires meaning and significance is ruled out here, but this does not give us the right to deny religion to the Chinese. The only thing that emerges from this fact is that religion is not an identical concept to belief in God, and one would do well to keep this strictly in mind. Religion in its purest sense is the question of the meaning of life. It stands in contrast to the world view, which is based on the facts of life and a summary of these facts. And if the Chinese spirit gives the answer to the question of the meaning of life: "Life is itself, in itself meaning" - while the religions of faith give the answer: "Life receives its meaning only from that which is beyond, metaphysical, precisely from God", then both, despite their inner differences, nevertheless coincide in that they both give an answer to the question of the meaning of life and are thus both religion.

Thus the two views of life, that of the Chinese spirit and that of the religions of faith, stand opposite each other, and the former is obviously a unique phenomenon within the spiritual life of mankind, endowed with the full charm of uniqueness, which all others, especially we Europeans, are perplexed by with the question: "How is it possible to cope without God?" Well, it is possible because it is possible to be religious, even without belief in God. Belief in God is not religion, it is just one of the forms in which the religious question, the religious problem, i.e. the question of the meaning of life, is answered.

We are immediately faced with the further question: "Which answer is better, that of the Chinese mind or that of the others?" There is only one yardstick for better or worse: the reality content. - And with regard to this, both answers are inadequate because they are both biased. You can only answer the question about the meaning of life, i.e. give a real religion, if you know what life is.

The question of the 'what' of life comes before all religion and determines not only the justification or non-justification of the idea of salvation, but also the form in which this idea of salvation is experienced.

As long as one is not clear about the 'what' of life, assertion stands against assertion, the life-loving person stands against the life-suffering person, the optimist against the pessimist. Nietzsche versus Schopenhauer, for the one eternity is "deepest, deepest bliss" (as Nietzsche sings in his hymn), for the other it is deepest torment, the one feels called to eternal life and chosen as if to a banquet, the other feels condemned to it, and both waste their arguments uselessly, for as long as one does not know what life is and consequently judges according to the facts, the one is just as right as the other and can also prove his right with the same forcefulness.

So, what is life? To this the Buddha gives the answer: "Life is a grasping process that takes place in the five grasping groups." In Majjhima Nikâya, the question: "What has the Exalted One taught that personality is?" is answered as follows: "The five grasping groups have been taught by the Exalted One that personality is, namely the grasping groups of form, sensation, perception, concepts and consciousness." So here we have a grasping that is such that what we collectively mean by "grasping" also belongs to it: grasping as nourishment, thinking, consciousness, as a form of eating.

Dementsprechend heißt es im Kanon, z.B. in *Samyutta Nikâya* II:

There are four types of nourishment: 1) material nourishment, coarse or fine; 2) sensory contact; 3) spiritual awareness; 4) consciousness.

With this insight, Buddhism becomes the "Middle Teaching", the "Majjhima Patipada", which lies between and above the two extremes of all spiritual life, faith and science. Faith believes life to be metaphysical in nature, purely spiritual, while science wants to prove life to be physical in nature, purely corporeal. - But in doing so, they both come into contradiction with themselves, i.e. with the fact that concepts exist. For if life were by its very nature a purely spiritual thing, i.e. a spiritual thing that exists in itself, how could it ever come to a concept of itself? The purely spiritual could only be itself, absolutely, and could never exist as such, i.e. as a conceptual relationship. On the other hand, if life were purely physical, how could concepts ever emerge from it? And the concepts are there after all and experience the impossibility of their own existence in the facts of "faith" and "science", i.e. they are in contradiction with the fact of their own existence, in that faith believes something that the concept can never reach, and in that science wants to prove something that can never reach the concepts. Faith transcends reality, it transcends, science distinguishes reality, it immanates and both coincide despite their apparent contradiction in that they are not in harmony with reality, a coincidence that points to a deeper, common root.

Buddhism stands between and above both as the Majjhima Patipada, in that it teaches: Life is neither a purely spiritual-metaphysical nor a physical-physical, but a conceptual, grasping in that real sense in which it grasps and comprehends spiritual as well as physical grasping in itself, grasping in the really strictest sense, in that this insight that it is so, the knowledge of myself as a conceptual process is not something outside this process, something existing in itself, something cognizing, but is itself a conceptual process, expressed differently: In the knowledge that I am a purely conceptual process, no act of cognition takes place towards myself from the standpoint of an I-self (atta) that exists in itself, but rather a rolling on, a further growth of comprehension takes place in it, not a confrontation with myself, but a constantly new reminder of myself. I am not saying this here in these short sentences because I think that you will now understand this without further ado. It took me many years of patient and patient thinking to come to this realization and I am only telling you this to encourage you to think patiently as well.

Thus: According to my nature I am neither a metaphysical (spiritual in itself), as faith would have it, nor a physical (physical in itself), as science would have it. According to my nature, I am certainly spiritual, but not a spiritual being in itself, i.e. a metaphysical being, but a spiritual process, a conceptual being, i.e. something that, because it is a process, requires the physical in order to exist. As such I am my metaphysical, as the Buddha says: an-atta, which is the pâli word corresponding to our word ametaphysical.

The mutual relationship between the physical and the spiritual is expressed by the Buddha in the formula of the mutual dependence of spiritual form and consciousness, a formula to which I can only refer here.

Thus: I am a grasping process, a grasping process, a conceptual process and the knowledge that it is is also a form of grasping. But where does this conceptual process come from, what is the origin of the I?

In the act of faith I am (as atta = soul) an intrinsically existing, eternal, absolutely beginningless, absolutely endless, condemned to eternity. - In the attempted act of experience of science, I am a life phenomenon that descends from other life phenomena, the parents, these again descend from their parents, etc. in an endless series that leaves the question of the first beginning unanswered at all, constantly postponing it.

Here, too, the Buddha word stands as Majjhima Patipada between and above faith and science, as a process of comprehension. As a nourishing process, I am a self-sustaining process, i.e. not a mere reaction of other life processes, not a mere gradient from the parents. - Power is there, but this power is not power in itself, absolute power, absolutely beginningless, absolutely endless, but it is a process, precisely the process of comprehension, and thus something that, in order to be there, must always first spring up from its own preconditions, and the point of application from which it springs up is the non-knowledge of itself, thus instead of the absolute beginninglessness of faith, instead of the relative beginninglessness of science, the reflexive, i.e. self-referential beginninglessness of the Buddha teaching.

The role that not-knowing plays as a constantly new point of deployment of the conceptual process called "I" is given in the twelve-limbed series of dependent-simultaneous origination (paticca-samuppâda). - In it, the ego experiences itself as a process in the strictest sense, i.e. as an ability to arise and thus also as an ability to cease, in short, as the beginninglessness, so constituted that it includes the ability to cease. I, i.e. life as something that experiences itself, is a cessation.

We have thus given the keyword to which all life listens and to which all life is in bondage: cessation. - What am I? What is life? A cessation? This brings us to our topic and at the same time to the answer to this topic: redeeming knowledge is the knowledge of redeemability. - Redemption here no longer retains the sense of an act of divine grace, nor the sense of annihilation in the mechanical-materialistic sense of property, but redemption here is the realization of a possible and thus necessary task. With the recognized cessation, the realization of this cessation, the cessation as the last goal is given, the cessation as the last task. - Samsâra, this changing world of ever new births, ever new administrations, is also such that nibbâna, salvation, is not beyond it, to be reached from it only in a transcendental leap, but that it carries nibbâna within itself as the final fulfillment, a fulfillment that takes place in a process of detachment experienced in progressive awareness, which begins with right insight as the first link and ends with right absorption as the eighth link. - Where the samsâra, this world here, is recognized as the ever new intervention that is life itself and creates life, then nibbâna is no longer something that stands opposite this comprehension as an object, be it in the form of a scientific comprehensibility, be it in the form of a scientific comprehensibility, be it in the form of a believing incomprehensibility, but there nibbâna is the cessation of this comprehension, and salvation is neither salvation from the transient life, nor is it salvation in the form of a final annihilation, but it is the cessation of the comprehension that is life itself.

This cessation can be experienced; salvation is a process that can be experienced, nibbâna can be realized. - This process does not occur within this existence, nor outside of it, it is not immanent, it is not transcendent, - but it is the fading away, the cessation, the extinction of existence itself, the final experience: the experience of de-living. - Consciousness is there, but it no longer springs up anew, in new life-creating comprehension, like capital that no longer yields interest, but consumes itself, like a flame that no longer absorbs oil and burns towards extinction. "Old kamma (purânam kammam)", the result of thought, the result of action, no longer a living flame, but the repercussion of earlier burning, like a stored-up supply of heat that ceases because there is no further sustenance. The senses rest calmly on things, no longer mingling with them like the drops of water on the lotus leaf, only one experience sounding again and again; the experience of de-living, the experience of which the end can be foreseen, just as the end of burning can be foreseen with a flame that no longer receives oil. - "In being liberated is the knowledge of being liberated." - "Finally extinguished with consciousness that no longer has a footing" is the standing expression for the Arahât, for the finally redeemed in the finally redeeming realization.

In the Udâna, the Buddha says: "Just as the ocean is permeated only by the taste of salt, so the teaching is permeated only by the taste of salvation." In this longing the deepest string of all existence resounds, in this longing the highest opens up. - The Chinese spirit with its cool, unaffected certainty of life and its freedom from doubt and fanaticism, from religious violence and intolerance is certainly a surprising and captivating phenomenon; the life of the Indo-Germanic peoples with their fervent thoughts of redemption, with the rage of passions that were and still are captivated by these thoughts, is of course a distracting and repulsive phenomenon, and yet truth, reality and ultimate fulfillment glow unconsciously in this rage. And this ultimate fulfillment is experienced in the redeeming knowledge, in the right insight that the Buddha gives when it is processed into the right resolution, and when this is further processed into the right speech, the right action, the right livelihood, the right effort, the right internalization, the right absorption.

Here, redemptive cognition turns from mere hope into reality, because it emerges from a clear insight into the "what" of life, into the essence of reality. Buddhism cannot be proven, it does not need to be believed. That is why the teaching is called "knowledge and change". It requires a decision, just as it requires a decision to take a bitter medicine. The decision requires trust in the Buddha and this trust in turn requires the shattering realization that life is not what it seems, but that it is a questionable, thoroughly shakable life. - It is true, and the Buddha experienced and expressed it: "Understanders are hard to find. - But blessed is he who hears and senses what it is all about."

Veneration to him, the teacher!