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佛學論文

TOPICS ON BUDDHISM

ATTA OR ANATTA

by Brother Upaya

In Asia the question of soul or no soul has been debated for over twenty-five hundred years. Schools of thought have been split on this delicate subject and in consequence thereof, either the extreme, that there is a personal soul, or, that no soul exists during life or after death. This humble preceptor will try to explain the mean, or the Middle Way of Buddhism.

Let us examine the question of whether the ego-consciousness continues to exist after death and decay of the body. Brahman teachers speak of the senses as follows: "Not the eye sees, but the seer in the eye; not the ear hears, but the hearer in the ear; not the tongue tastes, but the taster in the tongue; not the nose smells, but the smeller in the nose; not the mind thinks, but the thinker in the mind; not the feet walk and the hands act, but the actor in the hands and feet."

Since man has the aforesaid senses or qualities, he is deluded into thinking "I am this person, I possess eyes, ears, nose, tongue, etc." This agent of activity in man, is often called the soul or the atman. When death occurs, we all agree that these senses cease to exist in the deceased. However, and this is the crux of the subject, such senses do not die. It is only the body that identified itself as the ego that dies. These senses, the same in every way, appear in other human bodies.

The body in order to function, depends upon the senses. The component parts of the body are comprised of inanimate elements. The Brahmin may postulate all sense experience as Brahma and he would not be in error. The Buddhist, either of the Theravada or Mahayana school, may call all this sense phenomena, as KARMA and he too, would be correct.

If we look upon our senses as something having the Quality of permanence in the form of a separate ego-consciousness, we would

negate every known scientific fact. If we look upon the senses, as LAW, KARMA, or as the natural laws of the universe, We begin to understand much of the formless and the deathless, a something without a beginning or without any conceivable end. The seeker after wisdom, will at once recognize this as the all-important center of man's being. That such senses exist and function in the body, but cease to act and yet exist when the body decays, few would care to deny.

"Impermanence characterises everything in the universe" is a law that can stand the investigation of any scientist or philosopher. Since it is the eye that sees not, but the sense of sight or law, that does the seeing, we know therefrom that this LAW is a universal law, without any conceivable beginning or end. The Buddha taught that the beginning of life and the laws that govern, cannot be apprehended by the intellect. It may be safely assumed though, that if not one atom of either hydrogen or oxygen remained in the universe, it still would require two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen to make water. The law remains inactive and become active again when the atoms of Hydrogen and oxygen appeared upon the scene. This then, like the law of the senses, is deathless, without a beginning or, without any end. All beings function within this law, and escape from its coils can come only to the all-enlightened ones. If one identifies oneself with the integral whole, our true nature, often expressed as the universal law, such a one attains a peace of mind that comes from understanding. From understanding comes wisdom; from wisdom comes Bliss.

A SERMONETTE

In the name of the omniscient Teacher, in the name of the compassionate One, knower of the past, present and future—Hail!

"How is there joy, how is there laughter, as this world is always burning? Do you not seek a light, ye who are surrounded by darkness?" Dhammapada.

Let us briefly examine light. Not the light that illuminates material things, but rather the Light awareness brings to the sincere seeker for enlightenment. Awareness brings wisdom which in turn illuminates men's hearts.