

FETTERS

An abstract painting by Henri van Zeyst, featuring a complex composition of overlapping shapes and colors. The central focus is a vertical, elongated form with a face-like appearance, rendered in shades of green, blue, and yellow. This central figure is surrounded by various other elements, including a large red shape on the left, a striped pattern on the right, and a white, grid-like structure at the bottom. The overall style is expressive and non-representational, with a rich palette of colors and textures.

HENRI VAN ZEYST

Fetters

Henry van Zeyst

1946

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Introduction

The search for Truth, for realisation, emancipation, enlightenment, assumes in most people the form of a positive quest. They even personify the object of their search, which becomes a pursuit of God. Though great spiritual men have declared that “the kingdom of God is within thee”, the search becomes a pursuit of an objectified imagination. But a pursuit is also a running-away, an escape. In this mad run however, and not before, man feels that he is fettered; and his desire to be free in order to become united with the object of his spiritual longing, becomes stronger. Feeling his impotency to break those chains; which have been imposed upon him—whence he knows not—he tries to obtain help from outside. But by relying upon outside help he goes away further and further from the kingdom within, and he merely makes fresh bonds which tie him down more firmly than before.

It is only the man who searches, that feels the weight of his fetters. There are millions who do not perceive these bonds and feel themselves free in their lustful lives. Still their very search for even greater satisfaction of the senses prove the emptiness of their lives, which are bound by the gross chains of the flesh.

True freedom, real emancipation cannot be had by running away with our fetters, nor by amusing ourselves within the prison walls, nor by clinging to them, but by breaking, those fetters and walls, which have been forged by tradition, convention, society and religion. To break those fetters we must know them, realise that they are fetters and not supports. When this is understood,

it produces pure action (*kriya*), i.e. not action (*kamma*) which produces reaction (*vipaka*), as such action itself is a reaction to an environment which we have not understood. And this pure action, action without purposeful striving, will break the spell of delusion—the fetters which keep us bound.

Delusion is intensified by the misuse of language. Satirically it has been said, that words are used to hide our thoughts. If when we mean one thing, we say something else, it can only lead to greater confusion. In the following pages therefore, words like “mind” and “cause” have not been used, except in connection with the views of others, because there is nothing corresponding to these sounds. “Mind” is the act of thinking, which may be more or less perfect in awareness, but remains action nevertheless. Mind in the sense of something which can think is non-existent. Similarly “cause” in the ultimate sense does not exist outside the faith of the pious believer in God. Hence preference is given to expressions like “condition”. It would have been good, if words like “I” and “self” could have been omitted, for they too represent a non-existing entity; but their avoidance would cripple the language so much that speaking and writing would become impossible. And perhaps that would have been for the good of all.

1. The Misconception of Individuality

The most formidable fetter is not self-consciousness, but self-delusion. Self-consciousness would be awareness of the real nature of ourselves. This is extremely rare, as we are mostly aware only of certain reactions induced in us by the environment. Frequently we are not even aware that we react at all, and our actions amount to little more than mechanical responses to certain stimuli. This, of course, can never lead to the understanding of reality, for as long as the current thoughts cannot detach themselves and are merely products of the environment, we cannot have detached views. We just form a part of the mechanistic process of the universe, which we see from inside, moving with and moved by the current of events without individuality, without self-consciousness. It is the absence of self-consciousness which produces this fetter of the misconception of individuality.

The mechanistic world-view does not consider the mind as something separate from matter, and in this our Materialists are quite right. But are they not going too far, when they try to reduce mental reaction to the simple level of chemical reactions? It is true that matter and material objects form conditions on which depend the birth of thoughts. The grey matter of the brain together with the nervous system form the necessary adjuncts by which man thinks. Yet, all these materials brought together artificially, i.e. outside a living organism, do not produce thought.

It is with the recognition of these facts that the doctrine of annihilation (*uccheda-dit̥ṭhi*) is rejected. But many, while freeing themselves from the rigid bonds which reduce man to a machine, have run away too far, in the opposite direction to the fetter, which is the fetter of misconception of individuality as a separate I-entity. It is this glorified "self" which becomes a spiritual soul endowed with everlasting life (*sassata-dit̥ṭhi*). It is self-delusion.

And how does consciousness become self-delusion?

Thoughts arise dependent on contact with sensible objects. The impressions caused by the environment on the senses produce reactions in the individual. Repeated reactions are differentiated, and classified into different groups according to some common characteristics, in which process many particulars are overlooked, until finally a sensation comes to be judged as acceptable or rejectable, i.e. agreeable or disagreeable. Subsequent events are similarly judged, compared, registered, and by this process the faculty of memory is born.

Memory is thus a retention of past experiences. But those past experiences have been retained only partly to make classification possible. In other words, what the memory has learned from experience is extremely imperfect and based entirely on reactions to a changing environment which was not understood, but was accepted because it was agreeable, or rejected because it was disagreeable. The registration of those reactions, based on half understood untruths, forms the standard by which new experiences are judged and classified. Thus it happens that no event is judged purely on its own merits, for it is always measured according to old standards. Every new thought is thus guided by past thoughts, conveyed in a direction particular to that individual, shaped and moulded, till finally tendencies are fixed and one's character is stereotyped.

In this process of fixation of character is born a sense of separateness which causes all the inner limitations and isolations, which form so many bonds and fetters, and thus prevent growth and movement. Where self-consciousness would see a process

of action, ever becoming and always new, self-delusion sees separation, permanent individualism, creating a “self” or a “soul” which is not only the recipient but also the custodian of all past experiences. The retention of past experiences prevents the full understanding of present and new experiences, because even the old ones have lost their value as they are dead and past and were never fully understood. Furthermore the understanding or rather the realisation of truth is only possible, if the individual process is understood. But as long as the reaction to the past experiences prevents the full comprehension of the present, there cannot be true intelligence, even though there may be knowledge.

Naturally, from this unnatural way of living in a dead past, from this lack of understanding the present environment, arises disharmony which is a conflict that only strengthens the opposition based on self-delusion, because this very conflict is classed as undesirable, i.e. not in harmony with the tendencies of “self”. Thus the delusion of self as a separate, isolated, permanent entity, which looks at the environment with hostile eyes where-with a house-owner would view a nightly intruder, becomes stronger with each new experience, always withdrawing deeper and deeper into the self-protective shell of its dead past.

Where self-delusion sees isolation and permanence in individuality, self-consciousness sees an ever new becoming process of action. Where self-delusion lives on the past, self-consciousness lives on the present—and is the present. True and full intelligence shows itself in the perfect action of the present moment, which solves the actual conflict,—not by forcing it into the mould of past experiences, thereby killing the present, nor by projecting it through purposeful striving into a future not yet born—but by the understanding of “self” as a process of reaction to environment. It is the binding of one’s individuality to the dictates of the environment, expressed as laws of society and convention, religious prohibitions and selfish fears, traditions, habits and customs—it is this binding to the environment, which constitutes the fetter of self-delusion, a fetter that can be broken only through the

understanding of that environment of which the individual is a mere product. The understanding of “self” as a reaction makes it one with the ever-changing environment, dissolves the delusion of its separateness, dispels the misconception of opposites and thereby ends the conflict.

To seek a method of breaking this spell of self-delusion would amount to the forging of a new fetter. The only thing to do is to live completely in the present, to change over from reaction to action, so that every moment is a new creation, not brought about by reactions like attraction or repulsion, but by an independent action which alone is capable of giving true freedom and deliverance.

2. Perplexity

The delusion of separateness, which is the misconception of individuality and which gives rise to the classification of opposites, leads on naturally to perplexity, resulting from that dual world-view. Perplexity arises from not facing the problem wholly; it is a lack of reflection (*vi-cikicchati*). Most people either confront a problem with their intellect alone, without consulting their real feelings; or they are guided by their emotions, separate from their understanding. When one enters the conflict with the intellect alone, it becomes like a dissecting knife, analysing, criticising, dislocating, dismembering and even taking away the vital breath of life. Knowledge makes man cold and heartless. And a solution thus forced upon a problem can only have the effect of a psychological suppression which results in the bursting of the bund elsewhere.

None can afford to ignore one's feelings and tendencies. But to be guided by emotions alone without understanding is even worse than calculated crime; it is folly of the first magnitude; for emotions are blind and none can say whither they may lead one.

Perplexity then is due to the fact that brain and heart are in conflict. Reason tries to find motives wherewith to deceive itself, but the heart within feels the wrong and cries out in protest. If the heart predominates, evil inclinations might try to overcome the resistance of the knowledge of duty, and the conflict is felt as a violation of sacred rights. This takes place in the person who is intellectually convinced of the right course of action, who does

not waver in agitation and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), but who feels the lack of strength to act accordingly. This lack of strength is only imaginative; it is due to the tendency to preserve energy, and the reluctance to pursue an issue to the end. This approach is partial, either intellectual or emotional; and in this vacillation, perplexity increases, paralyses action, induces procrastination and lets a golden opportunity pass by.

Indecision is so strong a fetter because it is mental inertia, producing clumsiness of thought, checking all initiative, blocking all progress. Though often cloaked as conservatism, it actually is fear of change, fear to break the routine established by religion and society, fear to differ from others, to appear eccentric. Thus people prefer to embrace a ready made religion which was probably good only for the original founder. They would rather be carried away downstream, even whilst suspecting disaster in the end, than work themselves across the flood. It is the lack of self-confidence and a secret desire for snug self-security and comfort, which makes man refuse to take risks, or even be disturbed.

All this is due to the memory of past weaknesses, when trials were made unsuccessfully. And thus, even if a new trial is made, it is made with much hesitation and diffidence. A backdoor is kept open to return to old ways of living, either intellectually or emotionally, and the new situation is never met wholly. Memory of the past becomes a fetter on the movement of the present.

In perplexity we run away from discomfort to seek self-satisfaction elsewhere, not realising that "I"-consciousness is at the root of all sorrow and conflict; we run away from transiency to look for the eternal truth, not realising that the whole significance of truth is in the transient; we run away from suffering to find a possible cure through the help of others to whom we pray, not realising that none can help us but ourselves; we run away from conflict in the hope that the imitation of others in authority can solve our problems, not realising that by turning to others the problem of duality is made only more complicated and perplexity intensified.

It is this doubt which makes us search for the truth, thus always missing it. Our search for truth is but a trial to escape from conflict, but it is not a solution of it. It is this spirit of escape which makes us study philosophies, practise systems of mind-control, follow codes of ethics, set up a standard of conduct, traditional, conventional, religious, or otherwise. In these, in the manner of the ostrich we take shelter so as not to see the conflict any more. We have even formed for ourselves an idea of truth, and we strive for its attainment. That goal is called by some God or Brahman, by others Enlightenment or Nirvana. It is not the truth or the attainment we are disputing here, but the fallacy of striving. Searching for a goal we do not know, is like searching for a thing which has not even entered the field of our imagination. But on the other hand, if the goal is known, then we are in possession of the truth and searching becomes impossible. Thus all our striving and searching is finally not for attainment, but is a search for a shelter of comfort, consolation—an escape. As Nirvana is independent of conditions (*asaṅkhata*) and cannot be produced (*akata*), all striving must fail and only cause greater perplexity.

We search in the past with the aid of our memory for our previous experiences; and distilling them like some elixir of life, we build out of them a standard of living—another prop to support us in our perplexity—to conform to our daily life. Or we try to penetrate the veil which hides the future, to build up securities in coming lives. Thus our belief in rebirth or our constant questioning of its possibility is but a disguised craving for self-continuance. Rebirth understood as a process of action and effect, of conditioning environment and resulting reaction, will leave no room for enquiries about other spheres, about salvation or damnation. But in perplexity thoughts are ready to follow any lead; they will accept any doctrine which holds out some hope for the future. Then one might think that perplexity has been overcome in faith, but in reality it has been a suppression of doubts. Thoughts are not allowed to run freely and intelligently

their natural course; they are submitted to religious authority. Thus blind faith blocks the road to mental development and to the understanding of the truth.

Perplexity should not be confused with skilful doubt—which is an aid to enlightenment (*sambojjhaṅga*)—namely the spirit of enquiry, or of investigation of the nature of things (*dhamma-vicaya*). Perplexity has a paralysing influence, but doubt spurs on to investigation, to fuller understanding. To reach the summit of comprehension of the truth of everything, we have to start at the bottom by doubting everything. Perplexity is scepticism, but doubt is agnosticism. Intolerant denial of every assumption becomes dogmatism itself; but active doubt will solve itself by deeper awareness of actuality. To escape from the confusion of perplexity people take their refuge in faith, in authority and in religions based thereon. They mould their lives on revelation which is an experience of somebody else. Truth is intuition and realisation for oneself. Thus perplexity is a formidable fetter, as it prevents intellectual freedom.

3. Attachment to Ritualism

The long history of the human race is dominated by belief in and servitude to the supernatural. The speculations of the primitive man on the nature of strange forces around him have been replaced by theological arguments; the idol of roughly hewn stone has given room to the spirit of God; but the fear which created the one as the other remains the same throughout. Philosophers have divided themselves into the great camps of Materialism and Idealism, and the line of division remains the unknown nature. Even where we see atheistic systems of thought like the Sankhya philosophy on which both Buddhism and Jainism largely drew, or schools of scepticism which flourished in Greece, in all of them we find a development in a direction not intended by their originator, notwithstanding the growth of experimental science and freedom of thought and expression.

Man is a social animal. His inborn herd-instinct makes him feel uneasy when alone, and this need for comfort and consolation has penetrated not only his physical cosmos but also his mental cosmos. In his way of thinking too man fears to be alone and in the dark. His different religious systems are merely a reflection of this primitive need.

There have been few men who dared to think independently, but in their lifetime they were not universally appreciated. Some, like Gotama the Buddha were stoned; others like Jesus were

crucified, or poisoned like Socrates, exiled like Mohamed. After their passing however, the scene changes. Then those who did not have the courage nor the intellect to think independently for themselves, found consolation in following them as their masters. Even though some like Gotama the Buddha expressly declared that everyone has to work out his own problems for himself, still thousands took and will ever take the opportunity of taking refuge in him and relying upon his words without trying to make those words live within their own lives.

This necessity for mediators and comforters has become so essential to religion of any type that those original thinkers would hardly recognise themselves or their doctrines, if they were to return and find that their images are being worshipped and their instructions have been converted into dogmas. The creation of authority is a sign of weakness. Instead of trying to overcome that weakness by inner growth and development, man has made himself crutches on which he can rely, which will give him consolation in sorrow which is of his own making, of his own delusion. It is mental weakness which induces man to make spiritual crutches. But weakness is no excuse, it is a defect; and defects are of no consideration. Religious systems, instead of helping man to grow, keep him down in infancy; instead of giving him the truth, they offer a means of escape from actuality by concentrating on a future life. Postponement and evasion are the chief accusations to be levelled against organised religions. They postpone the duty of the present moment by making man live for the future, and thereby they evade the natural conflict which torments every man who has not realised the truth. Instead of understanding sorrow, they merely point out an escape from sorrow into a supernatural bliss.

To obtain this bliss much effort is required, much assistance is needed too; and thus we find organisations, catering for this need of man, where this effort is made in common and where it is assisted by superior authority. In his desire for security man grasps at this opportunity and forges link by link the fetters of

attachment to rites, rituals, ceremonies, dogmas, prayers, purifications, offerings, sacrifices, into a chain which no effort can break. Hence even methodical effort to free oneself is only a new bond, as the method itself becomes a new crutch of delusion, upon which reliance is placed rather than freedom sought.

The bondage in which we live is a mere delusion, a dream. And as long as we are in that dream-state no amount of energy will wake us up, for even that energy will be a delusion. The authority of persons, of dogmas, of religious performances, of the different paraphernalia of religion and devotion, has been set up for our own consolation, i.e. for the satisfaction of our selfishness, to give that sense of security which is a craving for continued existence—for permanence. Thus religions have become spiritual insurance companies, where at the cost of a certain amount of spiritual exercise heavenly bliss can be bought, sins forgiven, a shortcut to perfection shown. But that shortcut is only a means of escape. Instead of going to our teacher Life—even if life means sorrow—we try to run away from sorrow, not realising that we cannot run away from life. Hence religions show another—a better, a supernatural-life, and together with it the different means of attaining it.

Virtue or good deeds (*sīla-vata*) are frequently performed for the purpose of acquiring merit. But that really means that the good action is not performed for its own goodness, but for the sake of some underlying motive, e.g. to secure heavenly bliss. In that case the act is not a pure action, it is not a complete action, and therefore not a true action. It is an act of self-seeking, a search for security based on ignorance and born of fear. Such actions are only substitutes; and even if they produce the desired effect, that too would be merely a prolongation of the process of delusion. If an action is but a means towards an end, then that action itself has no value. An action is only pure and complete, if nothing further is expected, if that act is performed spontaneously, grown out of the full understanding of the circumstances which called for such an action. There will then be no limitation of time, no

trying to escape from actuality, and in that full awareness will be the comprehension of reality.

As long as virtuous acts, religious practices, disciplinary regulations, methodical exercises are valued as means of exchange, religions will only be commodities of commerce. Social service as a means of acquiring merit is not service for those in need, but an exploitation of them, because they are used as a source of profit to ourselves. Prayer is an indirect admission of one's inferiority complex. Uttering sacred words without understanding them may have a psychological effect, but then they are no better than a drug which temporarily relieves the pain without curing the disease.

To frame one's conduct according to fixed rules may appear necessary in social life, but that is only in a society which does not understand itself. If life is understood fully, virtue will come automatically; a truly wise man is always a good man. Every moment of life is a fresh one with different conditions, and therefore a fixed rule can never be applied to all similar cases. Ceremonies seem to be good enough for children, but is it not the duty of a teacher and a parent to see to it that children grow up? A teaching which becomes a system (and this applies to all organised religions) is a dead authority, which can have no dealing with the living.

The delusion that good deeds suffice is a contagion (*parāmasa*), a moral corruption which affects the very roots of true living. Without breaking this fetter not even a beginning can be made to enter that stream of life's fullness (*sotāpatti*), which flows out into the ocean of deliverance.

4. Sensual Pleasure

Of all the problems with which man is faced in this world, the social problem, which is the mutual relation between different sexes, is regarded as the most difficult one. Any problem will arise from a duality, i.e. a division of interests between brain and heart, between intellect and emotion. As long as the intellect sets up a standard to conform with the natural feelings, which cannot be standardised, because they are reactions to an ever changing environment, it will rise in revolt. A standard is something of the past, but reactions are of the present. Hence a constant conflict which is sorrow, shows that every aspect of life has two opposites.

Sex-relations too form a problem on account of the placing of sexes as opposites. But femininity (*itthindriya*) and masculinity (*purisindriya*) are expressed in many ways besides the generative organs. Some psycho-analysts have even maintained that any mental problem has at the bottom a sex-problem. If the problem is a reaction, then sex itself forms the action. To solve the reactionary problem, one has to comprehend the action in its fullness.

Female activity is that which gives form to the formless which develops, grows and multiplies. But in order to do that there must be the passive attitude of receiving and assimilating: and also the action of expressing. Thus female characteristics are submissiveness, docility, humility, generosity, emotional liability, and a lack of assertion.

Male activity on the other hand, is that which initiates, di-

rects and intensifies. In this is shown the active attitude which gives strength to growth, guidance to sensation, reason to action. Thus male characteristics will be a sense of superior importance, aggressiveness, leadership, pride, egotism, meanness, stinginess, and also rationality—though it often leads to irrational deeds when emotions are excluded.

From this analysis it will be seen that there is more of completion and interdependence than of opposition. Indeed, to be perfect the passive and active elements should not only be balanced, for that is still opposition—but they should so grow together as to form actually a harmonious whole. To formulate a number of characteristics may simplify the understanding of a thing, but it can never correspond to actuality. By doing so one arrests a continuous development at a particular point, and thus narrows one's viewpoint to a cross-section, throwing light on the opposing halves, but failing to see the process as a whole. The process is like that of the water of a river, flowing down naturally. Yet in its very action of flowing it is obstructed by itself in so far as the different particles cause a friction by their motion. Hence the reaction appears as a certain irregularity, a lack of harmony, owing to undercurrents forming wavelets and eddies.

So it is with the characteristics of sexes, when taken apart. Then sensual pleasure becomes emotion without intelligence, which is passion, which is the beginning of conflict. What is usually understood by love, is the sensation of incompleteness. Without realising that this feeling of insufficiency is conditioned by an inner discontentment with the surroundings of daily life—without realising that this discontentment finds its origin in the lack of understanding of life—sensation grows and stretches feelers to find something to fill that emptiness. And in their search an image or an ideal is formed to fill the emptiness. Hence according to this ideal a search is made, and finally on the ideal image is imposed the selected object. It does not follow that the selection corresponds in full to the imagination; but as the senses seek their own satisfaction, they are more concerned with their need than

with reality. Anyway, love is based on selection, which means agreement with self.

And why is this selection made? Love is not outgoing, except for a few sentimental expressions; and therefore selection is made for obtaining the sole right of possession. If the love of a couple were truly for the good of each other, unfaithfulness could never change that love into hate. But as things are, a mere suspicion suffices to make all love fade, because this love is greed for possession, and that too for exclusive possession. But as the desire to possess limits affection the sensation of emptiness can never be satisfied.

Truth, on the other hand, knows no love which is partial, which is selection, which is an expression of egoism. Truth knows no distinction of sexes, for Truth seeks completeness of life. Truth understands that the Formless cannot exist without a form, that intelligence and feeling cannot be separated without causing conflict, that life is only complete with head and heart united in one individual, that in a process of change and growth and evolution there is no real difference between giving and taking, that in the fullness of life there is only action without reaction, that in the completeness of understanding there are no opposites and hence no objects for love. Truth is not concerned with self and others; for that is the sphere of delusion.

This may not appear very practical; but if the world has no place for understanding, who is the loser? The world loves for a purpose, namely for the satisfaction of self. And thus it is that lust for sensual pleasure becomes an essential element in the emotional attitude of human lovers.

Is there then no altruistic love? As long as love is not altruistic, it is of course pure selfishness. And even when love is altruistic, it is far from perfect, because it is based on a delusive distinction which preserves the separation between self and others. The fact that the motives in the question of others' happiness are so much more complicated than in the case of our own personal interests, shows the presence of the conflict between opposites. Self-love

comes spontaneously; it is pure craving. Love for our neighbours, however, does not come so naturally; it needs argument, which is a proof that the division is maintained. In the case of self-love we do not even perceive it as love. The hand brings food to the mouth; the eyes direct the feet on the path; but this is not love, it is the perfect, spontaneous harmony of nature.

A feeling akin to this natural harmony is sometimes experienced at the sight of suffering. It is not sexual love, but compassion, sympathy. Here a liking to help rises spontaneously. As long, however, as this feeling originates in the imagination, which pictures ourselves in that miserable state, compassion again would be self-love. Perfect sympathy feels the sorrow of all without distinction; it is not interested in the individual, but in the cause of suffering. As soon as a particular interest is evolved there must be selection, which is separation, isolation and selfishness. The sublimation of the sex-instinct will never break this fetter, but on the other hand, in the realisation of the delusion of separation and in the comprehension of the whole process in which there are no integrating facts of a combination or union but only different aspects of the fullness of life, all distinctions disappear.

5. Aversion

In common parlance we speak of love and hate as emotions, but they are more than that. An emotion is an excitement, a passing phase, or as we called it earlier, a reaction. But love and hate—though they show themselves as reactions each time the beloved or hated object presents itself physically or mentally—are rather dispositions, i.e. mental attitudes which are the summing up of many reactions. It is again on one's dispositions that one's character is based. Characters can be changed, but dispositions are, or are not.

Hate is an irascible disposition which is well expressed by the word aversion (*vyapada*), which indicates a turning away (*vi-apajjati*). It is a disposition to experience emotions of disagreement between subject and object. This emotion may arise and pass off, but the disposition remains owing to the turned-off attitude. This disposition of aversion is due to the mental attitude, which as in the case of love is based on a distinction between self and others. Here too, it is a separation between the intellect and the heart. As a matter of fact, the two sentiments of love and hate, though appearing to be opposites, comprise so many identical parts, and are an indication of their common root. Though affection is only proper to love, and aversion to hate, still both attraction and repulsion are the results of an underlying instinctive fear with the "self" as object. The hope of exclusive possession, which is called love, is tinged with fear as much as the repelling instinct in hate. Fear, common to both, is conditioned

by ignorance; and here again we are back at the very root, viz., the delusion of self. Though love and hate have “others” as their direct object, it is really the “self” as a misunderstood delusion, which is at the bottom of these dispositions. Emotions, like reactions, come and go; characters can be changed and altered; but dispositions are in delusion, and are *not* without delusion.

Most of what is called love is actually nothing but predilection, favouring one more than another. But that necessarily results in the exclusion of others who are less favoured. A turning to one naturally comprises a turning away from another, who thereby becomes an object of aversion. Thus particular friendship easily evokes jealousy. It brings about the mistaken idea of exclusive rights, which are rooted not in the other, but in “self”. As long as sympathy and antipathy, conversion and aversion, turn round the centre of self, they are only different in degree, like heat and cold, but not in kind. Both are expressions of selfishness. Agreement with self is love; disagreement with self becomes hate.

It will be seen that there is a great conflict which man finds difficult to solve in himself; and thus he projects himself outside himself as it were and fights his battle there; he wants to possess himself in others. Thus even aversion, or the reaction which is hate, is a kind of desire to thwart any harmful influence. It is a desire to destroy the opposing element, in order to eliminate that which is considered the cause of the conflict. The cause however does not lie in the object, but in the action of turning away. For by that action is created the opposites, which produced the conflict. To eliminate one party does not solve the problem; both parties must go. Then aversion will not become love, but aversion will not be possible.

But as long as “self” with its imagined exclusive rights of possession dominates the scene, jealousy and envy are bound to appear. There will be discontent about the prosperity of others. It does not necessarily follow that one wishes for oneself the honour or the gain acquired by someone else; for it may be that one already possesses the object or the title, which was recently

obtained by the other. Thus envy is not greed, but discontent and ill-will. It is the feeling that everyone must be the same and have the same so that no one can put himself forward. Very often it poses as virtue in a demand for equality, or *esprit de corps*, social conscience, solidarity, etc.

Envy, however, may grow out into a certain satisfaction over the misfortune of someone else, even if that misfortune does not mean gain to oneself. This ill-will may become so active that it turns to cruelty, in the same way as love expresses itself in affection and tenderness. The pleasure derived from cruelty is called sadism. It is of course not the pain inflicted upon others, which is enjoyed, but the accompanying sexual excitement, produced by the success in mastering the object. In this impulsion, the behaviour towards the object—whether in love or in hate—appears to be a matter of indifference, as long as mastery is obtained. If the object co-operates, it is love; if it does not, it is hate.

Psychologists may try to explain sentiments of hate and the disposition of aversion as primary, instinctive fear. Moralists may show means and methods to change hate into love. Rationalists may show the originating conditions of aversion in physical disharmony. All may try to overcome hate, some by war, others by love. But the true release from this fetter is found in the solving of the distinction between subject and object.

Hate does not always need to have someone else for an object; it may even turn against oneself. It seems strange that the self-preservative instinct can so forget itself, as to develop hate for oneself. But the craving to destroy all objects which are a source of pain, appears sometimes stronger than the sense of loss suffered by the frustration of other desires like the satisfaction of the needs of self-preservation. Ascetics seeing in their body a source of sin, have inflicted on themselves tortures which appear expressions of hate, but which have given them in reality immense satisfaction, so much so that they could smile happily in the midst of their self-inflicted mortifications. This pleasure, derived from imposing suffering on oneself, is called masochism.

Hate is a kind of hostility and its origin must be sought in conflicting desires. The antithesis of self and non-self forms the basis for the opposites of pleasure and pain. When self becomes identified with pleasure, non-self, i.e. the object, the other one, becomes identified with hate. Hence it follows that the disposition of hate has developed earlier than that of love. And it follows too that love only arises because of the pleasure it gives to self; and hate arises because of the satisfaction it gives through self-assertion.

Therefore it is not the object of hate that should be eliminated, but the selfish action, which produced it. If one tries to overcome feelings of antipathy against a certain person by sending out thoughts of loving kindness, one is merely heating the emotions, provoking reactions, which make pure action an impossibility. But when both hate and love are understood to be the outcome of false valuations, based on a misconception of self and others, this fetter will have been broken, not because of changed disposition but because of true intelligence.

6. Craving for Form

Fear and wonder at the startling and irresistible phenomena in nature gave rise in the crude intelligence of primitive man to belief in the supernatural. By experimenting with the less fear-inspiring objects of perception, and by succeeding in controlling them at least partly, fear was decreased to make place for awe. And finally, even awe had to yield to science, which only gave wonder and admiration for the still undiscovered regions of nature, but without calling them supernatural. But the primitive instincts in man, which form a part of his nature, cannot be conquered by science, for the mere reason that the child's intellect is not capable of understanding those phenomena when it comes in contact with them at the time of its greatest mental plasticity. Thus with the disappearance of fear of nature, man's belief in the supernatural did not disappear. And therefore his imagination created the heavens according to the crude conceptions of his childhood.

Just as religion dominates this world and its politics in peace as well as in war—in our present day we still hear of priests blessing tanks before they are sent to battle; kings are still crowned by bishops; judges open the assizes by prayer in the church or the temple—religion would dominate man's future life too.

Survival is always the main motive in any struggle. If a struggle is not successful now, there arises a natural hope to be successful on a future occasion. This struggle for survival, combined with the hope of success in the future, and thrown

against a background of faith in the supernatural, is a sufficient explanation of man's desire for rebirth, even when his sensual passions have cooled down. To speak of a religious instinct and at the same time to subscribe to the theory of evolution, would force one to admit religious inclinations even in the animals. But religious feelings are not instinctive, not innate, and hence not natural and essential to man. Religious needs, grow out of the instinct of flight, coupled with the emotion of fear. These give a basis for religious feelings. Thus it will be seen that the parents of religion are emotional fear married to the instinct of flight from danger which is always lurking in the unknown.

Indeed, religions are mainly a means of escape from conflict. Conflict being actual and present, an escape is sought in the future. It is for this reason that religions concentrate so much on the future. A religion which would deny a future life is unthinkable. On the other hand, it would be too hard for many a religionist—even for those with an intellectual bent—to admit that religions are merely the outcome of an intrinsic desire to flee from danger, i.e. that they are purely a means of escape. Hence a purposive psychology has been developed where escaping has been replaced by purposeful striving.

The search of a goal is an undeniable element in the process of evolution; and so the purely mechanistic viewpoint of a rigid law of cause and effect had to be modified and partly abandoned. Incentives and stimuli are acknowledged side by side with reflexes, so that causality has become conditionality to allow for the personal element of striving. As this striving in man is largely responsible for man's success in the material world, any development resulting therefrom is now considered as progress. But it has been completely overlooked, that as soon as man has reached the goal of his striving, he sets up a new goal, so that he remains a seeker for ever.

This is also seen in man's striving for the attainment of spiritual perfection. Even if he has overcome all craving for sensual pleasures (*kāmacchanda*), his striving does not cease, but is sub-

limited, transposed to a higher sphere, where the gross carnal joys have been replaced by the refined sense of delight in form (*rūpa*) and beauty. Craving for form (*rūparāga*) may have transcended lustful desires, but it still remains craving and desire. It may be a more refined craving, but nevertheless a craving and as all craving are bonds, so this too is a strong fetter, stronger perhaps for the very reason of its sublimation even than sensual pleasures. The more subtle and refined the form of craving, the more difficult it is to recognise it and to uproot it.

In this sense of delight in beauty, there will be some reconciliation, a synthesis of the lower sentiments of crude egoism and loftier expressions of self-love. Though on a higher plane, it is felt as aesthetic admiration, it remains however egoism. It is not easy to recognise the fact that pleasure obtained from the contemplation of an ideal is not altogether objective, but is dependent on the harmony and just proportion between subject and object, so that the “ego” still occupies the place of honour. Thus a desire to be reborn in happy states which are free from the lust of the senses may appear very virtuous and praiseworthy. A striving to obtain those mental states of absorption (*jhāna*), where thoughts are submerged in spiritual beauty and joy, may appear as true spirituality and perfection. In reality their only usefulness exists in the weakening of the different obstacles on the road to perfection.

Far from being perfection themselves, these mental states may or may not become helpful means to that end. If skilfully handled they may be a great help in the overcoming of the hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), but nothing more than that. If practised with attachment or sought for the purpose of spiritual delight, they will merely create new obstacles which may prove insurmountable, owing to their subtle and spiritual nature. A discursive tendency (*vitakka*) may easily become a speculative tendency, where higher truths are merely analysed for one’s intellectual satisfaction, without being lived and realised. Sustained application of thought (*vicāra*) might develop into attachment to one’s

own opinion and become stubbornness. Delightful joy (*pīti*) is frequently inebriating to such an extent that further progress becomes impossible. The bliss of well-being (*sukha*) might create the spirit of self-contentment which produces stagnation. One-pointedness of thought (*ekaggata*) might still fail to see the real nature of the object and thus in the tranquillity of the thought-process create the illusion of attainment, which might be nothing but self-consciousness which has not grasped the nature of self. Thus one might be free from sensations, but yet slave to emotions.

To escape from the fettering influences of the senses and then to be caught in the net of beauty and form by clinging to those delights is a change of prison, and not freedom. Whether one accepts these spheres of form as some kind of heaven in a different place, or as mental states in which the bodily senses do not predominate any more, makes very little difference. The attachment to these mental delights, in whatever environment they may be found, is the fetter which has to be got rid of.

7. Craving for the Formless

When all sense-pleasures are excluded and even desires for pure beauty have been overcome, there seems to be no further obstacle in the way of the seeker of truth. Thus a desire for virtue, for perfection, for wisdom, for truth—in short, desire for the formless (*arūparāga*) seems to be not only quite harmless, but even essential to a spiritual life. But even a desire for what is good, is still a desire and as such it must be a hindrance and a fetter. Desires for virtue, wisdom, or truth, can never lead one to those goals, because as long as there is striving for the attainment of a goal, there is acquisitiveness which can only be based on self.

A change of physical desires into emotional desires cannot be called progress in perfection, for though the experiences have changed and have become more subtle, though the objects of desire have become more spiritual—desire is there all the same. Desire for virtue will never produce goodness, because only that which grows from an inner necessity can be called virtue and desire is a striving. Actions which are produced by striving are artificial, are not natural and cannot be called virtuous. It is a mistake to call nature evil and to practise virtue for the sake of overcoming evil; for that makes virtue a means towards a negative end, and the practice of virtue an incomplete action, or rather a reaction. Desire for wisdom may produce learning and knowledge, but not understanding, intelligence and insight.

Desire for truth will emanate thoughts and scatter them in all directions, searching everywhere, but fail to concentrate and to realise the truth in one's own nature. Through gradual changes of the object of desire, truth will never be found. Increase in virtue and knowledge can never lead to final deliverance, for all ideas of change, of growth, of progress, preserve as their basis the idea of "self". It is the "I" which wants to acquire virtue, to grow in understanding and to come nearer to the truth. It is this separation of the "I" from the goal, which will ever prevent the realisation of the truth. It is that element of craving, of "I-ness", which forms the real fetter here, all the more difficult to overcome, because it is so cunningly concealed and camouflaged.

To unify the "mind" with unbounded space (*ākāśanañca*) is a delusion, for it is bringing the uncreated (*asaṅkhata*) within the limitations of thought. It merely leads to the ecstatic thought of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇanañca*), which soon will be realised as a delusion in the sphere of nothingness (*akiñcaññayatana*). No wonder that thoughts will become suspended, even if "nothing" is taken as an object and a goal. Thought may cease to such an extent that even perception will become imperceptible (*n'eva-saññā n'asaññā*) and is incapable of effective functioning. All this seems a growth in purity of thought. But in freedom there is no growth. It is, or it is not; and only when all fetters are broken, freedom is there in all its fullness. Whether a bird is tied to the earth with a thread of silk or with a chain of iron, it will not be able to fly, unless that bond is broken. It may be easier to break the silk thread, but unless it is broken, there is no freedom. Similarly, it may be easier to dispel the delusion of "nothing" than to break the spell of "self"; but as long as there is craving, be it only for the formless, there is no freedom possible.

Why then do people have craving for the formless, as there cannot be anything attractive to them there? It is because they have been disappointed by forms. Beauty proved to be impermanent and changing into its very opposite. Delights proved to be reactions to environment—and having realised that, another way

of escape is tried instead of facing reality. But this escape can never lead to a solution. People are interested in life hereafter—people crave for rebirth in better spheres, because they do not know how to live in the present. A desire arises for spheres of pure form, because they have never learned properly to live in the world of sense. And because even pure form did not give the answer to their longings, they seek an escape in the formless and in annihilation, if that were possible. Annihilation, however, they understand secretly as a removal of all obstacles, so that the pure “self” can continue to live for ever in unmarred conditions. The individual limited “self” is admitted to be a delusion to be got rid of; but in its place, a universal soul, of which all that lives and breathes and moves, which is only a manifested emanation—forms a new delusion, a stronger fetter. That imagined world-soul, through which each man finds himself even in the smallest blade of grass—finds with the cry: “That am I”, has indeed been done away with, with the separation of an isolated I-ness, but only to make room for a permanent universality in which the dynamic force of nature’s process is viewed as a delusion. If truth is seen as a delusion, there is a fetter indeed. Any delusion would be less serious than the one which sees the truth and turns away from it, mistake it for untruth. Thus craving for the formless (*arūparāga*) through its very detachment from sense-pleasures and beauty an extremely dangerous obstacle to freedom. It is this fetter which narrows man’s outlook, so that he does not discover the truth within himself, and searches for it elsewhere.

In craving for the formless, truth is made an object apart from the individual who is viewed as the subject. The very methods employed to bring the subject nearer to the objective truth lead only to further estrangement and isolation, binding man to rebirth. But as continuation of life is wished for, this fetter is not understood as an obstacle. It becomes an ornament, a state of perfection, a mental state comparable only with the highest heavens. The objectification of truth makes it something extremely worth striving for, worth running after, but in reality, it forms

a motive for escaping from the complexity of present problems. With the detachment from both sense and form is lessened also the opportunity to understand the environment which has form to which the senses react. To discard the form from the environment and to seek its real meaning in the formless, is to look for a substance under the phenomena, for eternity in time-concepts, for permanence in a changing process, for an everlasting universal soul in a cosmos where unity is only one of action, interaction and reaction.

Yet in the transient sensations truth is more evident than in shelters of pure joy, where even suffering ceases to be a problem. For this reason, craving for rebirth—be it in the spheres of form or in the formless spheres is even worse than craving for sensuous joy, because it is less actual. It needs the perfection of an Arahant to do away with this last vestige of possessiveness. A desire for rebirth with better opportunities is in reality an ill-disguised mental laziness, postponing the solution of the problem facing us here. He who craves for another life, is already dead to the present; but for him who lives in the present, which is eternally new because it is always beginning, the hereafter does not exist. Thus craving for a better life becomes a fetter to the present life, which not being understood fully, remains incomplete, and in its incompleteness produces a new conflict with false values, delusions and attachments, perpetuating ignorance and making the chance of deliverance ever more remote.

8. Conceit

Even if self-delusion has been overcome and an individual is fully aware that personality is nothing but a process of action and reaction, conditioned by inner tendencies and outer environment, there may still remain a strong fetter of self-assertion or pride. For, though “self” be recognised as a fleeting process of change, it does not follow that all individual action must be understood as produced by universally common factors. Though a river is a constantly changing current of flowing water without any abiding substance, yet there are different rivers flowing in different directions. Similarly, while denying “self” as an abiding, permanent entity, one should not deny the differences between the changing phenomena of action and reaction, which are the conditions that produce self-delusion.

That self-consciousness become self-delusion was shown in the first chapter as due to living in the past, which binds present action to a past experience which is dead. Even when this is not done, the mere comparison between different processes of action may lead to an emotion of elation, when an opportunity offers itself to display one’s skill. Then an ideal self will be set up, elaborated from past experiences, which showed in their failings the weaknesses of the actions of the moment. Self-respect represses those failings, remembering only successes which actually turned out well, or which might have been successes, if action had been more efficient. And thus an ideal standard is erected.

Conceit is a tendency of ostentatiously displaying, like a

banner over all other flags, qualities one has or—perhaps more frequently—which one presumes to have. In this last case conceit will hide the proper motive of an act with pretension, simulation, deceit and hypocrisy. Its working is so very subtle that the real motive remains hidden even to ourselves. Then material and personal interest will be disguised as a sense of duty or justice, the right of freedom, the progress of the nation, the safeguard of democracy, etc. Especially the leaders of nations at war are very prone to use similar catch-words to camouflage their less unselfish motives and to sublimate their murderous instincts. Manifestos circulated during an election campaign are usually manifestations of conceit. Priests and monks always use religious motives like the forgiveness of sin, the acquisition of merit, the attainment of eternal bliss, to induce the faithful to more generous contributions; like merit-mongers they use those religious motives as a cloak to hide their desire for a more comfortable dwelling place or better food.

Conceit is an idealisation of the subject, which requires sublimation of primitive instincts and fundamental needs, which are not seen as defects, but as high perfection. This is an escape, a way out, by which the claims of nature can be conceded without having to be repressed on account of their imperfection. It is seeing self in an ideal light; and it measures everything by that ideal. Pride itself, which involves always contempt for another, is by utilitarianism and rationalism considered necessary and inherent in human nature. In the process of sublimation conceit is called the source of many virtues and talents, which only has to be directed to right things. Personal interests present objects to us only under those aspects which it is useful for us to perceive. This egocentricity leads to the delusion of thinking of ourselves as indispensable, as cynosures and the centres of society.

Even anxiety to help others may easily be a subtle kind of conceit which tells us that we are better financially, intellectually or spiritually; that nobody else will be able to give this help so efficiently; that we have more experience, superior position,

greater opportunities or stronger karmic tendencies. These subtle considerations may appear and sometimes are partly true. It is exactly this basis of truth, though grossly exaggerated, which makes it so difficult to detect and still more difficult to loosen this fetter. Even when those self-reflections are correct, they are thoughts of possessiveness—which is actually craving and clinging. Actions like social service, preaching, teaching and nursing performed in this spirit may appear excellent. But as long as their foundation is self-conceit, however subtle it may be the effects will suffer thereby and the beneficiaries will even be hurt without their knowing the reason. This then tends to be a cruel exploitation of an apparently more favourable position. Then the help given to others feeds only our self-love, as it results from an anxiety to give or to share what had been acquired by intense craving to possess.

Subjectively conceit is a certainty and a conviction of righteousness which is fatal to development, because it produces self-contentment and stagnation. Certainty of one's capacity to attain leads to postponement. Certainty of righteousness is reliance on the past. And thus both miss the unique opportunity of the present. This arrogance and presumption seem to contain some kind of regret of having denounced the "self" as a delusion at an earlier stage. If once a delusion is understood as such, thoughts cannot go back to it. And therefore another, more subtle view of "self" is introduced under an ideal form, to replace the crude, almost material self, which was abandoned with the first fetter. The idea of a personal soul has been discarded, and its place is taken by whatever in our nature is impersonal, but still distinct from others. Qualities and capabilities are asserted in a bold attempt sometimes to balance inferiority. Therefore it is called "conceit which says: 'I am'" (*asmi-mana*).

Misconception of self (*sakkaya-diṭṭhi*) was based on a wrong interpretation of the environment by the senses. These produced reactions which developed the memory with its reliance on past experiences and incompleteness of action in the present. It was

grounded therefore on perception. Conceit however is rooted much deeper. It is never associated with false beliefs (*micchaditthi*), but has always a grain of truth in it from which it develops. Most people are to some extent honest in their conceit, in so far as hypocrisy and pretension have become a second nature, hiding in the subconscious so well, that the real motives are actually unknown.

Now it may be understood that the isolation in self-delusion was the superficial result of these unknown tendencies, worked upon by, and reacting to an environment which was not understood. Conceit on the other hand, as an idealisation of self, is less closely connected with perception and consciousness. It is frequently the necessity of giving up some object of attachment—which always equates with some part of self—which reinstates that self in a sublimated form. Religions especially abound in facts which show the truth of this statement. Just as cannibals ate the flesh of their victim if he had shown much courage, in order to assimilate his fearlessness, so our modern, civilised faithful go to church to partake in holy communion of the flesh of the Son of man.

The sublimation and idealisation of self, without projecting it in some form of existence or other, establishes it in a super-relationship to others, and holds on so tenaciously that only the perfectly holy one is completely free from this fetter.

9. Agitation

Agitation is a lack of understanding of the environment as a constantly changing process in which we are not a fixed entity, but in which we change with and are changed by the different conditions which constitute life. Conflict arises when the world is seen as change and the self as static. In the friction which ensues we try to stop the changing events and cling to them. That struggle is the fetter of excitement which is a ceaseless effort to escape from conflict.

Excitement is a fickleness of character, a lack of balance, a disproportion of dispositions, absence of persistence and independence. It is due to a high degree of susceptibility to the influence of pleasure and pain. In other words, agitation is the expression of sensitiveness, leading in turn to elation and depression. Fickleness shows shallowness of thought, high affectability and low intensity. Excitement is always emotional, and never intellectual, hence not a complete action. For where the intellect is excluded, an action can hardly be called human; it becomes a response to a stimulus which resembles machine-work, unless the intellectual thought-process is able to control the blindfold process of the passions. Thus it becomes a fetter, preventing true action, and producing mere reaction.

In a materialistic life, agitation shows itself in eagerness to excel in learning, to succeed in business, to make progress in the world, and in short to outdo others. It is the spirit of competition. In a spiritual life, agitation shows itself in eagerness to

attain perfection soon, in striving for spiritual virtues, in religious zeal to reform social conditions and correct wrongs of self and others, in employment of methods for spiritual development, in searching for truth by means of reading, learning, questioning and discussing the many problems, which different religions offer. In short, agitation is the intrinsically compelling force, which drives man on in his pursuit. He sees in it a purpose in life which compels him to strive for its attainment.

The purely mechanical world-view is untenable, for in the world of mechanics it is evident that no development takes place, where thought does not drive one on to action. On the other hand it must be admitted that thought would not even arise, if not for the working of an external world. In other words thoughts arise as a reaction. The environment acts as a stimulus. Hence the purely idealistic viewpoint also that man is free to choose his own way must be repudiated. It is this delusion of freedom which binds man with the fetter of agitation, which makes him strive after an ideal with means which are truly ends in themselves. It is the mistake of mixing up purpose and method, that is responsible for this delusion. A means is selected, and a method is used for the purpose of attaining something better, but in doing so it is overlooked that both the method and the end do not exist. If the end existed, striving would be superfluous. For, when travelling the object of the journey is not the goal, but the attainment of the object. If the object is achieved, the journey thereto is impossible. The method or means does not exist either, but is being made every moment. And as every moment brings some new attainment the purpose of striving cannot be attained except at the very moment.

Planning with a purpose follows from the awareness of a need in a certain condition in which man imagines he might find himself before long. It is like a prediction of a moon-eclipse which is sure to take place, if meanwhile nothing has gone wrong with the sun. But some day something is sure to go wrong even with the sun, the heat of which is measurably decreasing. Thus

these predictions based on calculations are reliable only up to a certain extent. How much less therefore will be the reliability of planning of incalculable thoughts.

This purposeful striving is a silent admission of one's imagined freedom of will. Free will is of course a gross delusion, for there is no will to be free, as will like mind is thought arising at the moment of contact, when choice is made possible. But even that choice is not free, as it is influenced and conditioned by the objects of choice. That is why agitation and planning ahead lead so many times to the disillusionment of a wrong choice, when reason was clouded by passion. Planning and purposeful striving are assertions of a separate self which can arrange things for itself and which can modify the environment. It is therefore a lack of understanding that we are rather the ones who are shaped by environment rather than the environment shaped by us.

To give oneself away like a piece of machinery, without understanding is the other extreme, which never leads to freedom, though it does away with individualism. Freedom, and striving for freedom in the absolute sense, requires an absolute being to be free. This is self-delusion. Mechanistic views kill both the individual and freedom. But the understanding of the environment leads to the understanding of the delusion produced by it. And that is freedom, because it breaks the fetter of purpose, which drives man on while keeping him bound like a slave. This understanding breaks down the barrier which isolates man from his world, and thus gives freedom.

But purposeful agitation is a striving in the spirit of possessiveness which can only produce more selfishness, isolation and delusion. For agitation insists on the introduction of a mediating factor which is similar to the employment of tools. This belongs to the region of reason and logic, and involves the desire of attainment as a kind of possessiveness. Religions have always failed as soon as they became organisations. For, organisations are based on methods which are of no value, unless they are an end in themselves. When this principle is reversed however, the

goal is reached not by striving but by the setting aside of the obstacles, by the breaking down of prison-walls and fetters. To save a burning house there is only one thing to be done, viz., to extinguish the fire. This action is not concerned with the house but with the fire, which is the immediate obstacle. If that obstacle is overcome, the house is saved naturally.

Why many people do not feel this driving force as a fetter, but rather as a perfection, is due to their narrow outlook confined to the pettiness of the treadmill in which they work as a sort of recreation from the loneliness of life which they dread. It is however like the desire for self-realisation which drives some into monasteries and caves, and many others into the whirlpool of the world.

Agitation can never lead to insight because it is a distraction of thought away from the present, and thus it stands opposed to mindfulness (*sati*). Awareness does not know anything of a "mind", nor of matter in itself, but only of material qualities in so far as they come within the field of the senses and produce there a process of thought. Awareness—living in the present—without worry about the past, without agitation about the future, prevents a cleavage between matter and mind that has led some to mechanistic laws which are self-subsisting and absolutely rigid, while it has led others to abstract speculations about the composition, spiritual or otherwise, of a mind like a soul, in idealistic conceptions.

The overcoming of the fetter of agitation must naturally lead to mental rest which is required for the understanding of the situation and the environment, which thus comes within the region of intelligence and insight.

10. Ignorance

Most ignorance, and certainly all ignorance which forms a fetter, is not a lack of knowledge, but insincerity or fear to discover one's errors, fear that one's vanity might be hurt and fear to be obliged to change one's life, are at the root of all mental reservations which stand in the way of an open approach which alone can remove insincerity of thinking. Strong views are not a sign of wisdom, but frequently betray the presence of prejudices which have arisen from experiences in the past. They are therefore views based on the past without containing any understanding of the present. Ignorance is not a lack of experience, but a lack of insight. This lack will mostly be produced by some personal bias; it will be therefore an artificially produced ignorance. People do not want to know, for knowledge is frequently inconvenient. And thus the fetter remains.

It needs indeed immense courage to live in integrity according to one's understanding. The "bliss of ignorance" and the "folly of wisdom" is more actual than the proverb might suggest. But if one really wishes to realise the truth, one must begin to be true to oneself. Wishful thinking must be replaced by absolute sincerity. Most religions however, though professing to lead to the truth, merely show the road to happiness, and frequently truth is sacrificed for the sake of bliss. To overcome this obstacle of ignorance one has to begin with a complete preparedness to accept the truth without any reservation, whenever it may be, wherever it may lead.

The difficulty of the problem is: How shall we recognise the truth when it presents itself to us? Reason is not infallible, and hence the reliance on the authority of others grows almost naturally. But then, if personal reason can fail, there cannot be more security in the reason of others. Ignorance cannot be conquered by reasoning, because the field of ignorance is wider than that of logic. Life, sorrow and their conditions are not logical, they are all just facts. We cannot say that facts are illogical, but they are not based on logic. It is rather logic that is based on facts. And thus it happens that the realisation of the truth is something which is entirely individual and cannot be proved to others. But there will be absolute certainty in the subject, while certain tests may reveal whether or not some degree of delusion is still remaining.

“The knowledge of deliverance will arise with deliverance”. But if this knowledge is entirely subjective, may that not equally well be a delusion? It might be so, if this knowledge of the truth would be recognition. But this is not the same as understanding. It is not theoretical or scientific knowledge; it is the actual clearing of all doubts, the actual overcoming of all obstacles. This can be tested, for if the conditions of ignorance and its effects are still present, ignorance itself has not been expelled.

What is the condition and origin of ignorance? “A first beginning of ignorance is not discernible”, and the very question about the origin of ignorance proves its existence. Ignorance has no first beginning. It is beginning always. It is a process. Not-understanding the nature of a process that can have no beginning, because it is not an entity, is ignorance which is always new as is the process which is not understood. In the not-understanding of the environment all action becomes reaction, all contact becomes grasping, all knowledge of the world becomes delusion of self. Thus all life which is not lived in the actual present is ignorance and the source of more delusion. The need and the desire to know the beginning of ignorance is ignorance itself, for it ignores the present. Thus, whether all delusion has been dispersed, can

easily be discovered by finding out the interest which is taken in, and the place which is occupied in the thought-process by past, present and future.

The passage from ignorance to understanding is not one from mechanistic materialism to metaphysics; it can rather be compared to the opening of a heavy curtain, which does not reveal something new which was hidden behind it, but admits more light which enables one to see the objects in the room in a different light. The same world, the same environment, but valued anew.

The fetter of ignorance is the reason of life that is a process of grasping. It is in ignorance that the two factors of life, the objective world and the subjective self, are rooted. It is in ignorance that objective science and subjective faith are opposing one another. Ignorance is the laying hold of the world and of self in the wrong way. To overcome this ignorance, experience is of no avail. No amount of suffering can ever cure a disease. Ignorance cannot be overcome by conceiving the truth, for truth is not a conception and conceptual thinking is still a thought that contains craving.

Ignorance is life with partial knowledge of it; truth is life with the full understanding thereof. And because ignorance allows one to live only partially, it produces sorrow. And because understanding makes one live fully, it produces bliss. But that bliss is no happy feeling or sensation, not even mental satisfaction, but just the fullness, the completeness of life, the rest and equilibrium of perfection. Our fetters are made from the perception of the opposites as material. When these opposites are understood as unreal, the fetters themselves will have disappeared without any striving or effort. In ignorance such perception becomes impossible, for in ignorance a solution is sought in past experiences or in future hope with agitation and craving as driving forces towards a goal. But suffering and life and all its problems are neither in the past nor in the future, and they will have therefore to be solved as and when they arise.

This can be done only by full awareness, by watching our activities and finding out their motives. Through integral awareness the truth of the present will become clear instead of trying to escape from the world or from life. Renunciation of possessions leads frequently to attachment to opinions and methods, which are self-made values. But in complete discernment of the values of the world and self, of their relation, of their non-opposition, this process of ignorance will be brought to an end.

The fetters themselves are a delusion. To become free is not so much a question of how to become free, or how to break those fetters. The question rather is: Why am I bound? If we try to break this fetter, it is only a process of more ignorance, for trying and striving are only other words for the process of obtaining, gaining, accumulating. The question: How to delude a delusion? must necessarily produce more delusion. The problem can only be solved by fully understanding, theoretically and practically, the reason why we are deluded. This can only be answered, if we are fully aware, again theoretically and practically, of the fact that we are deluded. Theoretical knowledge by itself is ignorance. This awareness can only be in the present moment. Here and now therefore, in this very moment we have to face the problem and so everyone carries his own key to the solution.

Life should not be a process of learning and accumulating. Life is meant to be lived, to be met in its fullness, every moment anew. The solution once known, must be put into practice. Then, with the disappearance of ignorance will have gone also all sorrow, fear, doubt, craving, egoism, wrong views and all fetters; and that is bliss everlasting, the final awakening to the Truth.

About the Author

Henri van Zeyst was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1905. Educated throughout in Catholic schools and colleges, he spent his final years of studies in philosophy and theology and the first year of his priestly ordination in an Italian monastery near Florence. At the age of 31 he was sent to London to be in charge of a new foundation of his Order, where he was also teaching Dogmatic Theology to the scholastics of Christus Rex Priory in North London. An intensive course of comparative religion brought him in contact with Buddhism. Within a year of his coming to Sri Lanka he was ordained a Buddhist monk there in 1938 under the name of Bhikkhu Dhammapāla. From 1956 to 1968 he worked at the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya of which he was in the final years of that period the Senior Assistant Editor and Administrative Officer. During the last stages of his life he was residing in a meditation centre at Nilambe, Kandy, giving instructions to those who came to him for guidance on meditation.

He died on September 15th in 1988.