

Nirvana and Parinirvana

Nirvāna is no annihilation but absolute existence,

To see in Nirvāna annihilation amounts to saying of a man plunged in a sound *dreamless* sleep — one that leaves no impression on the physical memory and brain, because the sleeper's Higher Self is in its original state of absolute consciousness during those hours — that he, too, is annihilated. The latter simile answers only to one side of the question — the most material; since *reabsorption* is by no means such a “dreamless sleep,” but, on the contrary, *absolute* existence, an unconditioned unity, or a state, to describe which human language is absolutely and hopelessly inadequate.¹

Which, like Parinirvāna, is Absolute Being and Non-Being.

[Parinirvāna is] Absolute *Non-Being*, which is equivalent to absolute *Being* or “Be-ness”, the state reached by the human Monad at the end of the great cycle. (See *Secret Doctrine* I, 135). The same as *Parinishpanna*.²

But Parinirvāna without Paramārtha is no bliss, but extinction for Seven Eternities.

Sooner or later, all that now *seemingly* exists will be in reality and actually in the state of Parinishpanna. But there is a great difference between *conscious* and *unconscious* “being.” The condition of Parinishpanna, without Paramārtha, the Self-analysing consciousness (Svasamvedana), is no bliss, but simply extinction (for Seven Eternities). Thus, an iron ball placed under the scorching rays of the sun will get heated through, but will not feel or appreciate the warmth, while a man will. It is only “with a mind clear and undarkened by personality, and an assimilation of the merit of manifold existences devoted to being in its collectivity (the whole living and sentient Universe),” that one gets rid of personal existence, merging into, becoming one with the Absolute, and continuing in full possession of Paramārtha.³

¹ *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 266; [on whether Nirvāna is annihilation.]

² *Theosophical Glossary*: Parinirvāna. [Yong-Grüb in the Tibetan equivalent of these terms, “the absolutely perfect comprehension of Being and Non-Being, the changeless true Existence in Spirit, even while the latter is seemingly still in the body . . .” Cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (A FEW MORE MISCONCEPTIONS CORRECTED) XIV p. 436.]

³ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 53-4; [on Stanza II.2b.]



A Bodhisattva can reach Nirvāna and help out either objectively by remaining here on Earth, or subjectively while in the Devachanic regions within the attraction of Earth. But having once reached Parinirvāna, all contact is severed for the remaining manvantara.

The day of “Be-With-Us” indicates entrance to Parinirvāna: a long period of rest or Mahāpralaya, the “Great NIGHT.”



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A Bodhisattva can reach Nirvāna and live, as Buddha did, and after death he can either refuse objective reincarnation or accept and use it at his convenience for the benefit of mankind whom he can instruct in various ways while he remains in the Devachanic regions within the attraction of our earth. But having once reached Parinirvāna or “Nirvāna without remains” — the highest Dharmakāya condition, in which state he remains entirely outside every earthly condition — he will return no more until the commencement of a new Manvantara, since he has crossed beyond the cycle of births.⁴

See *Le Livre des Morts*, by Paul Pierret; “Le Jour de ‘Viens a nous’. . . C’est le jour où Osiris a dit au Soleil: Viens! Je le vois rencontrant le Soleil dans l’Amenti.” (Chap. xvii, p. 61.) The Sun here stands for the Logos (or Christos, or Horus) as central Essence synthetically, and as a diffused essence of radiated Entities, different in substance, but not in essence. As expressed by the *Bhagavadgītā* lecturer, “it must not be supposed that the Logos is but a single centre of energy manifested from Parabrahman; there are innumerable other centres . . . and their number is almost infinite in the bosom of Parabrahman.” Hence the expressions, “The Day of Come-to-us” and “The Day of Be-with-us,” etc. Just as the square is the Symbol of the Four sacred Forces or Powers — Tetraktys — so the Circle shows the boundary within the Infinity that no man can cross, even in spirit, nor Deva nor Dhyanī-Chohan. The Spirits of those who “descend and ascend” during the course of cyclic evolution shall cross the “iron-bound world” only on the day of their approach to the threshold of Parinirvāna. If they reach it — they will rest in the bosom of Parabrahman, or the “Unknown Darkness,” which shall then become for all of them Light — during the whole period of Mahāpralaya, the “Great NIGHT,” namely, 311,040,000,000,000 years of absorption in Brahman. The day of “Be-With-Us” is this period of rest or Parinirvāna. See also for other data on this peculiar expression, the day of

⁴ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (“REINCARNATIONS” OF BUDDHA) XIV p. 401 *fn.*; [commenting on “Tathāgata in His immense love and ‘pitiful mercy’ for erring and ignorant humanity,” who “refused Parinirvāna in order that He might continue to help men.”]

⁵ Gautama Head, Northern Qi Dynasty



“Come-to-us,” Vicomte E. de Rougé’s “Études sur le Rituel funéraire des anciens Égyptiens,” in *Revue Archéologique*, 1860, Nouvelle Série, Première Année, p. 249. It corresponds to the Day of the Last Judgment of the Christians, which has been sorely materialized by their religion.⁶



Lord Buddha attaining Parinirvana

⁶ *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 134 fn.; [on Stanza V.6b, re: Egyptian “Day COME-TO-US.”]



Causality and Nirvana alone are Reality

Blavatsky Collected Writings, (FROM THE CAVES AND JUNGLES OF HINDOSTAN) pp. 336-40.

IT is true that the Buddhists do not believe in God as an individual, as a personality independent from the universe, but their *summum bonum*, or *Nirvāna*, is identical with *the Moksha* of the Brahmanas. It is the final union of an infinitesimal *particle*, which in its separateness is limited, with the boundless and limitless *whole*; it is eternal and conscious life for the soul in the quintessence of the divine spirit. The soul is a temporarily separated spark, attracted by, and merging again into, the shoreless, flaming ocean of the *Universal Soul* — the primeval source of *All*. But such a final absorption of the individual soul, purified from all that is earthly and sinful, in the “Soul of the Universe” (*Anima Mundi*) does not mean the disappearance or “complete annihilation” of the human soul. In expounding to us this theory, the young Singhalese Dhammapadajoti, a very learned monk, crushed a little glass bulb filled with mercury, and dropping it onto a saucer began to swing it from side to side. The globules of mercury separated from each other, but at the slightest contact with other droplets blended together again. “Here you have *Nirvāna* and the souls,” said he.

“Why then is it deemed so difficult to attain *Nirvāna*?” asked one of our party. “With the existing mutual attraction [337] every soul, “on account of its identical nature with the *Universal Soul*, once freed from its earthly fetters, should be able to enter into *Nirvāna*.”

“Certainly; but this mutual attraction exists only on condition of absolute purity of the separate particles. See what will happen now!”

Having sprinkled some ashes and dust on another saucer, he dropped the globules of mercury into this dirt and added a drop of oil. The globules, formerly so lively, were now resting quietly on the bottom of the saucer, thickly covered with dirt. Vain were the attempts to roll them closer to the larger drop of pure mercury; they would not blend with it . . .

“Such are the consequences of earthly pollution,” explained Dhammapadajoti. “As long as the soul is not cleansed of the last earthly particle, it cannot enter *Nirvāna*, nor live the eternal life within the divine essence.”

“You believe then in life beyond the tomb?”

Dhammapadajoti laughed, with what seemed to be a slight contempt.

“We believe in it, of course, but we try to avoid its lasting too long, as this would mean a heavy, though perhaps deserved sorrow, in punishment for our sins. To live means to feel and to suffer; not to live, but to rest in *Nirvāna*, is synonymous with eternal beatitude.”

“But this would mean that you are seeking to *annihilate* the soul?”

“In no way; we only seek to annihilate the sufferings which are inseparable from individual life; we try to attain unconditioned felicity in the union with the Supreme



Universal Soul. It is only the Whole that is infinite and perfect; in separateness every particle becomes finite and full of imperfections and defects.”

I leave all further explanations to the metaphysicians. My aim is merely to prove that our greatest authorities on the philosophy of Buddhism are dealing with it in the dark. Here is another proof: in the first volume of his lectures, *Chips from a German Workshop*, in the chapter on “The [338] meaning of Nirvāna,”⁷ Professor Max Müller, in an indignant answer to some opponent, is trying to show on the basis of the fact that the word *Nirvāna* means something disappearing or extinguishing itself like the flame of a candle, that this meaning alone clearly explains the Buddhist religion. According to him, the Buddhists believe in the annihilation of the individual soul and strive after one thing only, namely, some day to cease to exist. In this article of Max Müller’s, Buddha appears either as an “atheist” or an “egotist” (in the metaphysical meaning of the words). He preaches beatitude, “a relapse into that being which is nothing but itself” [p. 288]. But to the great surprise and even grief of his followers, who had already become used to the *mot d’ordre* of the eminent scientist that all the Buddhists are “atheists and nihilists,” the esteemed philologist suddenly makes an unexpected *volte face*. In 1869, in a public lecture at Kiel, at one of the meetings of the “Association of German Philologists,” Max Müller announced before a large assembly his “opinion of long standing” that *atheism has nothing whatever to do with the teaching of the Buddha*, and that it is definitely a great mistake to think that *Nirvāna* really means the annihilation of the individual soul.⁸

Taking this into account, would anyone disagree with us, that the “great scientists” very often abuse their authority? Professor Max Müller, we must remember, was just as much of an authority in matters of philology and ancient religions in 1857 as in 1869. To assert dogmatically that the ancients believed so-and-so, one must first fathom the depth of their thought and understand not only their language, but their unique metaphysical ideas as well; this can be done only by comparing *all* the ancient philosophies, as each taken separately is entirely incomprehensible . . . “But this,” we may be told, “is what our philologists are now doing, with Professor Max Müller at their head.” Yes, but unfortunately so far their successful comparison has been concerned only with the dead letter; the living spirit has constantly eluded [339] them in the stuffy and foggy atmosphere of materialism . . . Only the careful study of the *Sutras*, the preaching of Gautama the Buddha (the first volume of the *Tripitaka* or “The Three Baskets”), and of the third volume of the same work, “The System of Metaphysics” of Kasyapa, the friend and disciple of the Buddha (a work that throws new light on the teachings of the Buddha and thus completes them), could illumine the darkness called Buddhism or the “Philosophy of Buddha.” In the *Sutras* the reality of the objective world is called the illusion of the senses; the actuality of form and of every substance is shown to be dangerous illusions; even the seeming reality of the individual or the *ego* is rejected. But precisely *that*, the existence of which is denied by all contemporary materialists, that which they try to erase from the face of the earth by calling it mere raving, unfounded speculation, the *Sutras* declare to be the

⁷ [Vol. I, pp., 279 *et seq.* Lecture of April, 1857. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

⁸ See Trübner’s *American and Oriental Literary Record*, October 16, 1869, pp. 562-63.



“only reality in the world of illusions,” and the “metaphysics of Kasyapa” explain to us why this is so. This reality is the *spiritual ego* of man, an ego entirely separate and distinct from matter, even the most sublimated. *Causality* alone is reality, because it has neither beginning nor end, neither past nor future, existing forever in the present, and all its actions are but temporary and secondary phenomena, “flashes of lightning in an ocean of electricity.” Everything passes away, everything changes in its objective form and, being subject to division in time and to mensuration, is all illusion; *causality*, however, is limitless and infinite and cannot be measured; thus *it is the only reality*.

Nirvāna is *nought* because it *is all*. Parabrahman has neither consciousness nor will, as it is *absolute* “universal consciousness” and *unconditioned* will. The infinite, beginningless and causeless Monad of Pythagoras is the *primal cause* of all; after the creation of the triad, the *monad* which “dwells in darkness and silence,” re-enters once more into its invisible and intangible abode. And yet, according to Proclus, it is this Monad that is the “eternal God” and the whole Universe gravitates around it. Hebrew Kabalists also conceive their *Ain-Soph* as unconscious and devoid of will, as it is the *causeless cause*, and the literal translation of the word *Ain* implies the negation of the following word — [340] *nought*. “The spirit has no outward form and thus it cannot be said to exist,” teaches the Buddhist work *Prajna-Paramita* (Perfection of Wisdom).

“What is Nirvāna?” asks King Milinda of the *arhat* saint Nagasena. “Why do the fruits of the *four* paths of virtue lead to Nirvāna? What is the cause of its existence?”

“The path to Nirvāna may be pointed out, but its cause is not known to anyone,” answers the sage.

“Why?”

“Because Nirvāna is causality itself. That which constitutes Nirvāna — beyond all formulation — is a mystery which apart from its own nature cannot be attained by the human mind. The eye cannot see it, the ear cannot hear it the nose cannot smell it, the tongue cannot taste it, nor the body feel it.”

“Therefore, oh Nagasena, Nirvāna does not exist?”

“Great King, Nirvāna *does not exist*, but it is.”⁹



⁹ Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (FROM THE CAVES AND JUNGLES OF HINDOSTAN) pp. 336-40

