

Notes on Nirvâna

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Om, shântih, shântih, shântih!

Om, peace, peace, peace!

(Upanishads, *passim*.)

ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ, ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding
(Phil., iv 7)

תרשנ רכ ינ םרלש םרלש ךך ךרמנ ךי

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.
(Isa., xxvi.3.)

[This is a beautiful text, resonant with the poetry of the Bible, or rather of the accepted English translation thereof. It is, however, always useful to verify, so I have obtained the help of two Hebrew scholars and have looked up other translations; with the following result:

Authorized and Revised Translation:

(1) "Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind is stayed *on thee*."

The italics mark the words admittedly not found in the original.

ITzR SMVK TTzR ShLVM ShLVM KI BK BThVCh.

(2) "He will keep firm whom thou shalt keep in perfect peace (lit., peace, peace), trusting in thee."

(3) "Thou shalt keep the firm mind in perfect peace trusting in thee."

The only other instance in which ITzR is found in the sense of "mind" is *Gen.*, vi. 5.

(4) "A steadfast imagination (or purpose) thou preservest, peace, peace — because in thee it is trusted."

(5) " Thou keepest the firmly established mind in peace — peace, for his confidence rests in thee."

Septuagint :

εἰσελθέτω λαός. . . . φυλάσσω εἰρήνην. ὅτι ἐπὶ σοὶ ἐλπιδί ἤλπισαν κύριε ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος

(6) "Let in the people . . . that keepeth peace. For with hope they trusted on thee, O Lord, for the eternity."

Vulgate:

Vetus error abiit; servabis pacem; pacem, quia in te speravimus.

(7) "The old error hath departed; thou shalt preserve peace; peace, for in thee we have trusted."

Theo. Beza (1680):

Cogitationi innilenti custodis continuam pacem quum tibi confidit.

(8) "Thou preservest continual peace for the mind for him who strives, for he trusts in thee."

J. F. Ostervald's French Protestant Version (1824):

C'est une délibération arrêté, que tu conserveras la vraie paix; car on se confie en toi.

(9) "It is a fixed purpose, that thou wilt preserve the true peace; for there is trust in thee. And yet there are people who believe in the literal inspiration of their own pet versions!]

[Page 3] There is a good deal of talk in Theosophical circles in the West about Nirvâna, and much indignant refutation of the general accusation that its votaries are simply preaching a pure, or at best but thinly disguised, doctrine of annihilation. True enough the objectors outside are as a rule as ignorant, perhaps even more ignorant, of the matter than its defenders in the Theosophical ranks. Nevertheless, if we investigate the matter impartially, we must confess that our championship of the belief, in nine cases out of ten, contents itself with the somewhat feeble assertion, "Whatever it means, it does *not* signify annihilation." I do not mean to say that any of us should venture on the dogmatic formulation of a creed of Nirvâna, or that we should impertinently add our personal glosses to the [Page 4] traditional formula, the ancient and venerable though simple statement, "Nirvâna — *is*", but I do think that we should have some clear idea of the problem, and be in a position to give some account of the matter.

The task I propose to myself in these papers has no further pretension than the stringing together of a few notes, which any student can amplify for himself. There will be nothing original, nothing dug out from

obscure sources. The books I shall quote from are all easily procurable: they are not the monopoly of scholars, but the common property of any ordinary student. The restricted number of students in the T. S. must therefore excuse the publication of these notes.

The idea of Nirvâna is not by any means peculiar to Buddhism. Whether or not it is to be found in the Vedas, we must leave future controversy to decide; that, however, it is the burden of the teaching of the Upanishads is unquestionable, and it is entirely credible, if not clearly demonstrable, that the older Upanishads antedated Buddhism by many centuries. It is true, however, that the Bauddhas [Some attempt has been made of late to show that the Bauddhas of India were not Buddhists, but as far as I can judge with no success] have brought the *term* Nirvâna into especial prominence; but not the *idea*. The synonym Nirvâna is more rarely found in the older scriptures, and what technical term is preferred I am unable to say. There are many phrases connected with the ideas of Shânti (Peace), Moksha (Liberation), Mukti (Emancipation, sc., from the bonds of matter or re-birth), and Nir-vritti (Completion, accomplishment, complete satisfaction), which is said to be confused with Ni-vritti, Returning into the bosom of the Ineffable (Brahman), which is opposed to Pra-vritti, Evolution or "forth-evolving".

In these notes, however, with the exception of a few quotations from the *Bhagavad Gîtâ* and *Vishnu Purâna*, I shall confine myself almost exclusively to the Buddhist view of the subject.

There is no doubt but that the teachings of Gautama Shâkya Muni, though a protest against the Brâhmanical literalism of his time, were nevertheless drawn from the esoteric sources of the Âryan Sanâtana Dharma or Ancient Law. The Kshatriya teacher once more tried to bring back the "lower mind" of the race from the illusions of a degenerate ceremonialism and false mysticism and place it on itself. Like teachers had done this before, did, have done and will do it again, when necessity arises, and the purer teachings get overgrown with ceremonials and dead-letterism. History shows that the effort succeeds for a shorter or longer time, and then the "lower mind" falls back into the old ruts, shaped differently perhaps but of the same nature.

It seems to me that there was no dispute between Gautama and the orthodox Brâhmins of the time about the ultimate fact, Nirvâna; what was called in question was the means to realize that fact. [Page 5]

Setting aside the question of dates which is still *sub judice*, the teachings of the Upanishads, Gîtâ and Purânas are the same as to the fact, and the teaching of Gautama the Buddha is also similar.

Let us then first of all select two works out of a regular library, simply as specimens, to show the so-called Brâhmanical view.

The passages in the *Bhagavad Gîtâ* in which the term Nirvâna is found are as follows:

Whose senses are from every side grasped back from objects of sensation, O thou of mighty arms, his *forth*-knowing (Pra-jñâ) is established (drawn *back* upon its source — *Prati*-shthitâ). The man of self-restraint wakes where it is night for all; and where (all) creatures wake, there

for the seeing sage is night. Even as waters flow into the ocean, which, though being filled, yet remains unmoved, so for him into whom all lusts enter; he obtains peace (Shânti), not he who lusteth in his lusts (Kâma-kâmî). He who, abandoning all lusts, lives free from attachments (sense-contracts), free from all thought of *I* and *mine*, free from the feeling of egoism — he goes to peace. This, O son of Prithâ, is the Brahmic state (Sthiti); he who reaches this is free from delusion; plunged in this state at the last hour of life he reaches the bliss of Brahman (Brahma-Nirvâna). [*Bhagavad Gîtâ*, ii, 68-72]

The Yogi whose happiness is within, whose joy is within, whose light is within, he, becoming one with Brahman, goes to the bliss of Brahman (Brahma-Nirvâna). [The commentator Râmânuja explains this as the bliss of the direct knowledge of the Self]

The wise ones (Rishis) whose sins have perished, whose doubts are destroyed, who are self-restrained, and rejoice in the welfare of all beings, receive the bliss of Brahman (Brahma-Nirvâna). For the self-restrained, who are free from lust and wrath, who have curbed their minds, and have knowledge of the Self, the bliss of Brahman is on both sides (of death). [*Ibid*, v 23-25]

Thus continually uniting his Self (Âtmâ — with the Paramâtmâ or Logos), with mind restrained, the Yogî attains the supreme nirvânic peace (Shântim nirvâna-paramâm), whose source is myself. [*Ibid*, vi, 25]

The view of the Paurânîk writers is the same, as may be seen from the subjoined quotation, in which the term twice occurs. In the *Vishnu Purâna*, Keshidhvaja describes the nature of ignorance, and the benefits of Yoga or contemplative devotion, as follows:

Travelling the path of the world (Samsâra) for many thousands of births, man attains only the weariness of bewilderment, and is smothered with the dust of imagination (Vâsanâ). When that dust is washed away by the bland (Ushna) water of (real) knowledge, then the weariness of bewilderment sustained by the wayfarer through repeated births is removed. When that weariness is relieved, the internal man is at peace, and he obtains that supreme felicity (Param nirvânam) which is unequalled and undisturbed. This soul is (of its own nature) pure, and composed of happiness (Nirvâna-maya) and wisdom. The properties of pain, ignorance, and impurity are those of nature (Prakriti), not of soul. There [Page 6] is no affinity between fire and water; but, when the latter is placed over the former, in a caldron, it bubbles, and boils, and exhibits the properties of fire. In like manner, when soul is associated with nature (Prakriti), it is vitiated by egotism (Aham-mâna) and the rest, and assumes the qualities of grosser nature, although essentially distinct from them, and incorruptible (Avyaya). Such is the seed of ignorance, as I have explained to you. There is but one cure of worldly sorrows (Kleshâ) — the practice of devotion (Yoga): no other is known. [*Kleshânâm cha kshayakaram yogâd anyanna vidyate*. Op. cit., Wilson's Trans. v 224, 225]

But, indeed, the problem of Nirvâna is as difficult of solution as that of the Parabrahman of the Vedântins, the Tao of the Tao-sse, or followers of Lao-tze, the great Chinese Mystic, or the Ineffable of the Gnostic philosophers. Those who know how reverently its solution is to be approached, how stupendous is the problem involved, how it transcends all human intellect, cannot but regret the unseemly and uncouth manner in which so many magazine and newspaper writers proceed to columns of misrepresentation and ignorant abuse, speaking of the *summum bonum* of the Buddhist as:

The cold hope of escaping the due rewards of our deeds by losing our sense of personality in an endless sleep —

as did an apologist, claiming the name of Christian, in a late issue of one of our most important colonial newspapers.

This is a sample of what has been consistently foisted upon the Western public, with exceptions almost too rare to be noticed, for a century.

There are, perhaps, two reasons for this: (1) the earlier generations of Orientalists who rushed into generalities from a superficial knowledge of the subject; (2) the over-cautiousness of the Buddhist metaphysicians, who, in fear of polluting the pure idea with any taint of material conception, have so sublimated the problem, that the Western mind, less practised in such subtleties, feels so helplessly out of its depth, that it imagines it has the void of the bottomless pit beneath it instead of being supported on the bosom of the ocean of immortality.

Perhaps, however, the newspaper writers and apologists are not so much to be blamed in the face of the works of the earlier Western writers on Buddhism, for Eugène Burnouf, Clough, Tumour, Schmidt, Foucaux, Spence Hardy, Bigandet, Barthelemy Saint-Hilaire, and others, gave it as their opinion that the Buddhist philosophers must have meant by Nirvâna, annihilation pure and simple. Opinions have changed since then, for Buddhistic study was, in those days, in its infancy in the West, and is still hardly out of its teens. In fact, if it were the custom of the Western Orientalist "to take anything back" — we may almost say that a recantation has been made. Let us take a very fair summary of the position [Page 7] assumed by the Orientalists of the old school in matters Buddhistic. Professor Max Müller in 1857, in a series of articles entitled "Buddhist Pilgrims", repeatedly asserted that the meaning of Nirvâna was utter annihilation, following in this the opinion of Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire. Having been taken to task, he defended his position in the following letter to the *Times*, entitled "The Meaning of Nirvâna".

The discussions on the true meaning of Nirvâna are not of modern date, and . . . , at a very early period, different philosophical schools among the Buddhists of India, and different teachers who spread the doctrine abroad, propounded every conceivable opinion as to the orthodox meaning of this term. Even in one and the same school we find different parties maintaining different views on the meaning of Nirvâna. There is the school of the Svâbhavikas, which still exists in Nepal. The Svâbhâvikas maintain that nothing exists but nature, or rather substance, and that this substance exists by itself (Svabhâvât), without a Creator or Ruler. It exists, however, under two forms: in the state of Pravritti, as active, or in the state of Nirvritti, as passive. Human beings, who, like everything else, exist Svabhâvât, "by themselves", are supposed to be capable of arriving at Nirvritti, or passiveness, which is nearly synonymous with Nirvâna. But here the Svâbhâvikas branch off into two sects. Some believe that Nirvritti is repose, others that it is annihilation: and the former add, "were it even annihilation (s û n y a t â), it would still be good, man being otherwise doomed to an eternal migration through all the forms of nature; the more desirable of which are little to be wished for; and the less so, at any price to be shunned", [See Burnouf, *Introduction*, p 441; Hodgson, *Asiatic Researches*, vol. xvi]

What was the original meaning of Nirvâna may perhaps best be seen from the etymology of

this technical term. Every Sanskrit scholar knows that Nirvâna means originally the blowing out, the extinction of light, and not absorption. The human soul, when it arrives at its perfection, is blown out, [“Calm “without wind”, as Nirvâna is sometimes explained, is expressed in Sanskrit by Nirvâta. See Amara-Kosha, *sub voce*.

It is pleasant to quote here verses 238 and 239 of the Professor’s translation of the Dhammapada:

“Make thyself an island, work hard, be wise! When thy impurities are blown away, and thou art free from guilt, thou wilt not enter again into birth and decay.

“Let a wise man blow off the impurities of his self, as a smith blows off the impurities of silver, one by one, little by little, and from time to time] if we use the phraseology of the Buddhists, like a lamp; it is not absorbed, as the Brahmans say, like a drop in the ocean. Neither in the system of Buddhist philosophy, nor in the philosophy from which Buddha is supposed to have borrowed, was there any place left for a Divine Being by which the human soul could be absorbed. Sâṅkhya philosophy, in its original form, claims the name of anîsvara, "lordless" or "atheistic" as its distinctive title. Its final object is not absorption in God, whether personal or impersonal, but Moksha, deliverance of the soul from all pain and illusion, and recovery by the soul of its true nature. It is doubtful whether the term Nirvâna was coined by Buddha. It occurs in the literature of the Brahmans as a synonym of Moksha, deliverance; Nirvritti, cessation; Apavarga, release; Nihsreyas, *s u m m u m b o n u m*. It is used in this sense in the Mahâbhârata, and it is explained in the Amara-Kosha as having the meaning of "blowing-out, [Page 8] applied to a fire and to a sage". [Different views of the Nirvâna as conceived by the Tithakas, or the Brahmans, may be seen from the Lankâvatâra, translated by Burnouf, p 514] Unless, however, we succeed in tracing this term in works anterior to Buddha, we may suppose that it was invented by him in order to express that meaning of the *s u m m u m bonum* which he was the first to preach, and which some of his disciples explained in the sense of absolute annihilation. [*Chips from a German Workshop*, i. 282-284]

In spite of the bogey, "every Sanskrit scholar" — which must be a first cousin of the non-existent Macaulayan "every school-boy" — if we are to believe Professor T. W. Rhys Davids, the veteran Sanskritist has beaten a retreat from this outpost, the insecurity of which he probably had in mind in penning the words which *some* of his disciples explained in the sense of absolute annihilation". In treating of the *Dhammapada* the philological serpent swallows its own tail as follows:

If we look in the *Dhammapada* at every passage where Nirvâna is mentioned there is not one which would require that its meaning should be annihilation, while most, if not all, would become perfectly unintelligible if we assigned to the word Nirvâna that signification. [*Buddhaghosha’s Parables*, p. xli, quoted in *Buddhism*, Rhys Davids, p 115]

Nevertheless the professor has fought hard in his retreat, and no one will say that he has yielded his hands without a brave struggle; witness the skill with which he tries to parry or, at least, turn aside the deadly thrust from the famous commentator Buddhaghosha, in the notes of his translation of the *Dhammapada*.

"Immortality", *amrita*, is explained by Buddhaghosa as Nirvâna. *Amrita* is used, no doubt, as a

synonym of Nirvâna, but this very fact shows how many different conceptions entered from the very first into the Nirvâna of the Buddhists. [“Sacred Books of the East,” vol x, *Dhammapada*, Max Müller, p 9]

A well-fought fight, no doubt, but in a bad cause, so that we do not regret the final rout of exact scholarship before the armies of fact.

Of the many writers on Buddhism, one of the most appreciative is certainly Professor T. W. Rhys Davids; differing as he does from the conclusions of some of the most distinguished of his predecessors in Buddhist studies as to the interpretation of the term Nirvâna, it will be of interest to summarize his researches on this point. [See *Buddhism*, pp 110, *et seq*]

As he says:

One might fill pages with the awestruck and ecstatic praise which is lavished in Buddhist writings on this condition of mind, the Fruit of the Fourth Path, the state of an Arahât, of a man made perfect according to the Buddhist faith. But all that could be said can be included in one pregnant phrase — *This is Nirvâna*.

Some of the synonyms given for Nirvâna [Page 9] are:

The Heavenly Drink (by which the wise are nourished), the Tranquil State, the Unshaken Condition (alluding to the "final perseverance" theory), Cessation (of sorrow), Absence (of sin, the four Âsavas), Destruction (of tanhâ), and other expressions.

This state of supreme peace is well described as follows:

He whose senses have become tranquil, like a horse well broken-in by the driver; who is free from pride and the lust of the flesh, and the lust of existence, and the defilement of ignorance — him even the gods envy. Such a one whose conduct is right, remains like the broad earth, unvexed; like the pillar of the city gate, unmoved; like a pellucid lake, unruffled. For such there are no more births. Tranquil is the mind, tranquil the words and deeds of him who is thus tranquillized, and made free by wisdom. [*Dhammapada*, verses 90, 94-96]

And even if the philological meaning of the term may be claimed to be "extinction", then:

It is the extinction of that sinful, grasping condition of mind and heart, which would otherwise, according to the great mystery of Karma, be the cause of renewed individual existence.

And again:

The three fires (of lust, hatred, and delusion) are opposed to Nirvâna, [Fausboll, *Jâtaka* texts, p 14]

It follows, I think, that to the mind of the composer of the *Buddha-vansa*, Nirvâna meant not the extinction, the negation, of being, but the extinction, the absence, of the three fires of passion.

It is a "sinless, calm state of mind". It is "holiness — perfect peace, goodness, and wisdom".

The Buddhist heaven is not death, and it is not on death but on a virtuous life here and now that the Pitakas lavish those terms of ecstatic description which they apply to Nirvâna, the fruit of the Fourth Path or Arahatsip.

The long Tibetan phrase to express Nirvâna means, according to Burnouf, "the state of him who is delivered from sorrow", or "the state in which one finds oneself when one is so delivered" (affranchi). [Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien, p.19]

From the Chinese version of the Sanskrit *Parinirvana Sûtra*, Beal translates:

I (Gautama) devote myself wholly to moral culture, so as to arrive at the highest condition of moral rest (the highest Nirvâna). [*Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese*, p 183]

Edkins tells us that in the biographical section of the History of the Sung Dynasty, there is a passage which speaks of Nirvâna "as the spirit's 'final home' (Ch'ang-Kwei, lit. 'long return')". [Chinese Buddhism, p 97][Page 10]

But, someone may say: Surely the learned scholars who have leaned to the opinion that Nirvâna means simply annihilation, must have had some just grounds for coming to this conclusion ? They could not all of them have been bigoted religionists, and would not have been so short-sighted as to have put forward an opinion that seems to be so easy of refutation.

This is well objected, and sufficient excuse to lend colouring to some such opinion may be found in the surface statement of the teachings of the so-called Southern Church of Buddhism, which is decidedly negative and agnostic in its presentation of doctrine.

Colonel H. S. Olcott in his *Buddhist Catechism* — which has been "approved and recommended for use in Buddhist schools by H. Sumangala, Thero, high priest of the Sripada and Galle, and principal of the Widyodaya Parivena", in Ceylon, and therefore must be considered as the orthodox teaching of the Southern Church, where, if anywhere, we should expect to find nihilistic ideas — describes Nirvâna as:

A condition of total cessation of changes, of perfect rest; of the absence of desire, and illusion, and sorrow; of the total obliteration of everything that goes to make up the *physical* man. Before reaching Nirvâna man is constantly being reborn: when he reaches Nirvâna he is reborn no more. [*Op. cit.* p 29]

Indistinct and almost totally negative as is this definition it steers wide of the dismal whirlpool of

annihilation. The physical man should mean something more than the man of flesh, and is probably used in contradistinction to the spiritual man, for the orthodox Buddhism of the south teaches that even the soul is not immortal.

"Soul", it considers a word used by the ignorant to express a false idea. If everything is subject to change, then man is included, and every *material* part of him must change. That which is subject to change is not permanent: so there can be no immortal survival of a changeful thing. [Ibid. p 58]

But why, again, "material", only? Of the five classes of Skandhas or aggregates, material qualities are the grossest, and as all the Skandhas are said to be subject to change and impermanent, this impermanency is made to extend high up into mental powers, the spiritual man alone crossing the threshold of immortality. Our understanding of the abstruse metaphysics and psychology of Buddhism depends vastly upon the ideas we have of the terms "soul", and "personality". Buddhism does not deny the imperishable nature of an ultimate spiritual reality in man, of a true "transcendental subject", of an immortal changeless "self", but it discovers the existence of change so far back in the innermost nature of man as to entirely destroy the hope of eternal immortality for much that Western minds regard as the very core of their being. But change is death, and where there is change there can be no immortality. Thus distinguishing [Page 11] soul from spirit or the Self, the immortality of soul is denied. As Colonel Olcott says:

The denial of "soul" by Buddha (see *Sanyutto Nikâya*, Sutta Pitaka) points to the prevalent delusive belief in an independent, transmissible personality; an entity that could move from birth to birth unchanged, or go to a place or state where, as such perfect entity, it could eternally enjoy or suffer. And what he shows is, that the "I am I" consciousness is, as regards permanency, logically impossible, since its elementary constituents constantly change, and the "I" of one birth differs from the "I" of every other birth. But everything that I have found in Buddhism accords with the theory of a gradual evolution of the perfected man — viz., a Buddha — through numberless natal experiences. [Ibid, p 78]

But, indeed, the problem of Nirvâna is so subtle, that to the uninitiated mind the expounders of the doctrine may well seem to hold the language of annihilation, if we do not hear them out attentively. It will be interesting to reproduce here, in this connection, the views of H. Sumangala, Thero, the learned Bhikshu who is so well known and respected in Ceylon, and who is, moreover, one of the best Pâli and Sanskrit scholars of modern times. In the course of a long interview with Mr. E. D. Fawcett the question of Nirvâna came up for discussion, and —

The high priest expressed his opinion to the effect that the laws of thought do not apply to the problem. The Brâhmanical idea of the absorption of the Ego into the Universal spirit was, however, he declared, fallacious, as any such coalescence involved the idea of cause and effect obtaining in Nirvâna — a state preeminently asankatha, [A-san-katha, lit, inexplicable] that is to say not subject to the law of causality. He then proceeded to deny the existence of any form of consciousness, whether personal or that of coalesced Dhyânic entities, in Nirvâna: rejecting the most rarefied notion of the survival of any consciously acquired memories in that state. Subsequently, however, he gave the lie to the annihilationists by admitting that this state was comprehensible to the intuition of the Arhat who has attained to the fourth degree of Dhyâna or mystic development, and furthermore that the "true self", that is, the transcendental

subject actually entered Nirvâna.....

I was able to extract from the high priest the admission (a) of the reality of this overshadowing Soul or "True Self", never realizable under the forms of the empirical consciousness, (b) of its capacity to retain and store away the aroma of the experiences gleaned in incarnation, (c) of its direct manifestation as intuitive wisdom in the higher states of Dhyâna, and (d) of its ultimate passage into Nirvâna on the break-up of the groups of causally conditioned Skandhas. [*Lucifer*, vi, pp 147, 148, 150; Article "A Talk with Sumangala"]

This doctrine of the Self is, however, brought out most clearly in Northern Buddhism, to which belong all the Esoteric Schools. Take, as an instance, the doctrine of the Lin-tsi School:

Within the body which admits sensations, acquires knowledge, thinks, and [Page 12] acts, there is the "true man without a position", Wu-wei-chen-jen. He makes himself clearly visible; not the thinnest separating film hides him. Why do you not recognize him ? The invisible power of the mind permeates every part. In the eye it is called seeing, in the ear it is hearing. It is a single intelligent agent, divided out in its activity in every part of the body

What is Buddha ? *Ans.* A mind pure and at rest. What is the law ? *Ans.* A mind clear and enlightened. What is Tau ? *Ans.* In every place absence of impediments and pure enlightenment. [Edkins, *Chinese Buddhism*, pages 163-164]

The "true man without a position" is the potential Buddha within every man.

Now what are these much talked of and little explained Skandhas ? As usual, authorities differ. Sumangala tells us that :

According to the Bauddhas, there is no other soul (in living beings) than the five aggregates (Skandhas). Every living being has the five aggregates. These are the material, the affectional, the perceptual, the impressional, the mental. The material are the bodies, beginning with atoms upwards, subject to changes on account of their being affected by heat and cold. They are called the material aggregates inasmuch as they are the aggregates of material objects. The affectional aggregates are all the pains and pleasures, etc., that are felt or are capable of being felt. The perceptual aggregates are those that receive the knowledge of objects by the senses. The impressional aggregates are all the impressions of the general, the good, and so on. The mental aggregates are all those mental phenomena which lead to acts that are liked (or to the rejection of acts that are not liked), [The Theosophist, i.144; being a translation from the Sanskrit of Sumangala, on p 122, with the corrections from the Errata printed on p 210]

Sumangala's category stands, therefore, as follows:

1. Rûpa or material.
2. Vedanâ or affectional.
3. Sanjñâ or perceptual.

4. Sanskâra or impressional.
5. Vijñâna or mental.

Eitel, in his *Sanskrit-Chinese Dictionary*, translates the term Skandha from the Chinese logograms as "bundles", "instincts", or "attributes", and gives the following list:

1. Rûpa or form.
2. Vedanâ or perception.
3. Sanjñâ or consciousness.
4. Karma or Sanskâra or [? moral] action.
5. Vijñâna or knowledge.

Rhys Davids gives a further explanation, adding the classes and subdivisions of each of the Skandhas. But the recurrence of the same term in several of the groups only adds to the confusion. His list with the Pâli original terms stands: [Page 13]

1. Rûpa or material properties or attributes.
2. Vedanâ or sensations.
3. Saññâ or abstract ideas.
4. Sankhârâ (lit., confection) or tendencies or potentialities.
5. Viññâna* [The seat of Viññâna is supposed to be in the heart] or thought, reason. [Buddhism, pp. 90 et seq.]

Spence Hardy gives the following translation of the original terms:

1. Material qualities.
2. Sensations.
3. Ideas.
4. (Mental and moral) predispositions.
5. Thoughts [*Manual*, p. 424]

Monier Williams in his dictionary calls the Skandhas "the elements of being or the five forms of mundane consciousness". We thus see that the translators have no very clear idea of what the Skandhas are in themselves. Sumangala's terms seem to throw most light on the subject, though "sensational" seems a better rendering than "affectional", and "impressional" should, perhaps, be understood in an active or karmic sense. The Skandhas seem to bear a striking resemblance to the Vedântic Koshas or Sheaths, but it would require one who was not only learned in both systems, but who had also some practical

experience of the inner planes of consciousness, to establish a just comparison between them.

It is owing to these Skandhas, according to Buddhist philosophy, that the sense of "I" or separateness, wells up in a man. This is the "great heresy", called in Pâli Sakkâyaditthi, or the "heresy of individuality", as apart from the Great Individuality or Self, and Attavâda, or the "doctrine of soul" as apart from the Self.

Passing now to the Northern phase of Buddhism, Eitel in his Sanskrit-Chinese Dictionary describes Nirvâna as follows : -

NIRVÂNA (Pâli, *nibbâna*; Siamese, *niphan*; Burmese, *neibban*; Tibetan, *mya ngan las hdas pa*, [Schlagintweit writes this as *nyangan las daspa*, by contraction *nyangdas*, (*Buddhism in Tibet*. p.98.) *i.e.*, separation from pain; Mongolian *ghassa-lang etse angkid shirakasan*, *i.e.*, escape from misery) . . .

[The Chinese terms are explained by] separation from life and death (*i.e.*, exemption from transmigration) ... or escape from trouble and vexation (*i.e.*, freedom from passion, klesha-nirvâna). ... or absolutely complete moral purity, or . . . complete extinction of the animal spirits, . . . or non-action.

(1) The popular exoteric systems agree in defining Nirvâna *negatively* as a state of absolute exemption from the circle of transmigration, as a state of entire freedom from all forms of existence; to begin with, freedom from all passion and exertion, a state of indifference to all sensibility. [Page 14]

Positively they define Nirvâna as the highest state of spiritual bliss, as absolute immortality through absorption of the soul into itself, but *preserving individuality*, so that, *e.g.*, Buddhas after entering Nirvâna, may re-appear on earth. This view is based on the Chinese translations of ancient Sûtras, and confirmed by traditional sayings of Shâkyamuni, who, for instance, said in his last moments: "The spiritual *body* is immortal". The Chinese Buddhist belief in Sukhâvatî (the Paradise of the West) and Amitâbha Buddha is but confirmatory of the positive character ascribed to Nirvâna, Parinirvâna, and Mahâparinirvâna.

(2) The esoteric [?] or philosophical view of Nirvâna is based only on the Abhidharma, which indeed defines Nirvâna as a state of absolute annihilation. But this view is not the result of ancient dogmatology. The philosophical schools which advocate this nihilistic view of Nirvâna deal in the same way with all historical facts and with every positive dogma; all is to them Mâyâ, *i.e.*, illusion and unreality.

He further describes Parinirvâna as:

The second degree of Nirvâna, corresponding with the mental process of resigning all thought.

The definition of Mahâparinirvâna, however, is not attempted by Dr. Eitel. R. Spence Hardy, though pretending that Nirvâna means annihilation, has an interesting chapter on the subject in his *Eastern Monachism*. He seems, however, to cut the ground from under his feet by the following passage:

In the *Asangkrata-Sûtra*, Gotama has set forth the properties of Nirvâna. It is the end of Sangsâra, or successive existence; the arriving at its opposite shore; its completion. Those who attain Nirvâna are few. It is very subtle, and is therefore called Sûkshama; it is free from decay, and therefore called Ajaraya; it is free from delay, the gradual development of events, and therefore called Nisprapancha; it is pure, and therefore called Wisudhi; it is tranquil, and therefore called Kshânta; it is firm, stable, and therefore called Sthirawa; it is free from death, and therefore called Amurta; its blessedness is great, and it is therefore called Siwa; it is not made or created, but supernatural, and therefore called Abhûta; it is free from government or restraint, and therefore called Anîti; it is free from sorrow, and therefore called Awyâpaga; and it is free from the evils of existence, and therefore called Tâna. ...

Nirvâna is Dharmmâ-bhisamaya, the end or completion of religion; its entire accomplishment. [Op cit., p. 292]

Spence Hardy also quotes as follows from the *Milinda-prashna*:

Nâgasena:

Great king, Nirvâna is; it is a perception of the mind; the pure delightful Nirvâna, free from ignorance, Awidya, and evil desire, Trishnâwa, is perceived by the Rahats, who enjoy the fruition of the paths.

Milinda:

If there be any comparison by which the nature or properties of Nirvâna and be rendered apparent, be pleased thus to explain them.[Page 15]

Nâgasena:

There is the wind; but can its colour be told ? Can it be said that it is blue, or any other colour ? Can it be said that it is in such a place; or that it is small, or great, or long, or short ?

Milinda:

We cannot say that the wind is thus; it cannot be taken in the hand, and squeezed. Yet the wind is. We know it; because it pervades the heart, strikes the body, and bends the trees of the forest; but we cannot explain its nature or tell what it is.

Nâgasena:

Even so, Nirvâna is; destroying the infinite sorrow of the world, and presenting itself as the chief happiness of the world: but its attributes or properties cannot be declared.

Milinda:

You speak of Nirwâna; but can you show it to me, or explain it to me by colour, whether it be blue, yellow, red, or any other colour; or by sign, locality, length, manner, metaphor, cause, or order; in any of these ways, or by any of these means, can you declare it to me ?

Nâgasena:

I cannot declare it by any of these attributes or qualities (repeating them in the same order).

Milinda:

This I cannot believe.

Nâgasena:

There is the great ocean: were anyone to ask you how many measures of water there are in it, or how many living creatures it contains, what would you say ?

Milinda:

I should tell him that it was not a proper question to ask, as it is one that no one can answer.

Nâgasena:

In the same way, no one can tell the size, or shape, or colour, or other attributes of Nirwâna, though it has its own proper and essential character. A Rishi [Initiate] might answer the question to which I have referred, but he could not declare the attributes of Nirwâna; neither could any Dewa [Dhyân Chohan] of the Arûpa worlds. [Ibid, 295, 297]

The *Milinda-prashna* contains much more of interest on the subject, and in a category of comparisons speaks of Nirvâna as:

Filled with the perfume of emancipation from existence, as the surface of the sea is covered with flower-resembling waves.

If we again turn to China, we find Professor S. Beal, in his lectures on *Buddhist Literature in China*, writing on Nirvâna as follows:

Buddha, therefore, sought out for himself the answer to his own question, "What is that condition in which renewed birth and death is impossible ? " [Page 16]

He found this in his theory of Nirvâna. Among other terms used in explanation of this expression in Chinese Buddhist works is the one I referred to in my first lecture, viz., the term Wou-wei. In the thirteenth section of the *Fo-pen-hing-king* the phrase is used Tan-wou-wei,

"praises of Nirvâna". Wou-wei, whether it mean non-action or non-individuality, seems to point to a "breathless" or "non-creative" state of existence. When *desire* sprang up in this condition, then sorrow began. This desire led to production, and production is necessarily evil. Go back, therefore, "stem the flood", Buddha taught, destroy the root of desire, and you will arrive at a condition of original perfection. Whether the term Nirvâna may not be explained etymologically as signifying a condition of "*not breathing forth*", *i.e.*, passive and self-possessed existence, is a question I shall not attempt to answer. But on one point there is agreement in all Buddhist works that have come before me, that Nirvâna is a condition incapable of beginning or ending (without birth, without death). [Corresponding to the Egyptian description of Kneph, "τὸ ἀγγένητον και τὸ ἀθανάτον" — the ingenerable and immortal] This conception developed finally into the worship of the eternal (Amitâyus), a worship still professed (though ignorantly) wherever this development has been allowed to progress on the lines of Buddha's original thought.

There is an expression found in the Chinese as a synonym for the name of Buddha, I mean Chin yu (the "true *that*", or "*thus*"), which evidently points in the same direction. "The true That" is the state of existence, ineffable and unthinkable, to which the Buddha has returned. I need not remind you how this idea of non-breathing existence (*i.e.*, passive and non-creative being) is exhibited in the direct efforts both of Buddhists and Brâhmans to suppress their breath when in a state of profound religious thought or ecstasy, as indicating a brief return to the condition of perfect and unfettered being. And, in fact, the modes of thought and expression on this particular point (indicating agreement derived probably from a primitive origin), common both to Semitic and Âryan, and probably Turanian nations, is very remarkable. The act of creation is attributed in Semitic records [And elsewhere.] to the "breath or Spirit of God moving upon the waters". If it be remembered that the "Spirit of God" may justly be rendered "a mighty wind" (although from our [The learned Professor is also a Protestant clergyman] standpoint there is no need to adopt such a rendering), this offers a remarkable agreement with the "strong wind blowing on the waters" explained in Buddhist records The condition of "non-breathing" or "not-blowing", then, is the same as a condition of non-creative existence, which is supposed to have been the original state of That, ere desire arose and multiplicity ensued. It is to this condition Buddha aimed to return when he taught us to extinguish desire, and so reach Nirvâna. [Op. cit.pp 144, 145.]

In the preceding notes Nirvâna has been several times referred to as the "Fruit of the Fourth Path" it will be useful, therefore, to add some information on this most interesting subject, and to follow it up with a brief note or two on the stages of meditation, or Dhyâna, that play so important a part in the Buddhistic Gnosis.[Page 17]

There are four Noble Paths (Ârya-mârga) leading to Nirvâna, each of which has two grades or aspects, (a) the perception of the Path, (b) its realization, fruition, or enjoyment (Mârga-phala). These Paths are: [Compare Spence Hardy, *Eastern Monachism*, p 280; Schlagintweit, *Buddhism in Tibet*, p 26; Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, p 108; Eitel, *Dict*, sub voce; Max Müller, *Dhammapada*, p. 48]

1. Srotapâtti (Singh. Sowan); lit., he who enters (*apatti*) in the stream (*srota*) leading to Nirvâna. He who has entered this Path will have but seven births to cross before the attainment of Nirvâna. In this Path he becomes free (1) from the delusion of "I" and "mine" (Sakkâya-drishti), (2) from doubt as to the Buddhas and their doctrines, and (3) from the belief in the efficacy of rites and ceremonies.

2. Sakrid-âgâmin; lit., one who will receive birth (return) but once (*sakrit*) more. The candidate must further free himself from (4) the desire of cleaving to sensuous objects (Kâma-râga), and (5) of wishing evil to others.

3. An-âgâmin; lit., he who will not (*an*) return (be born) again. The last remnants of desire, ignorance or ungentle thoughts, which are mentioned as fourfold, have to be eliminated. [Rhys Davids gives the list with the Pâli equivalents as follows:

1. Delusion of self (sakkâya-ditthi).
2. Doubt (vicikicchâ)
3. Dependence on rites (sîlabbata-parâmâsa).
4. Sensuality, bodily passions (kâma).
5. Hatred, ill-feeling (patigha).
6. Love of life on earth (rûpa-râga.)
7. Desire for life in heaven (ârûpa-râga).
8. Pride (mân).
9. Self-righteousness (addhacca).
10. Ignorance (avijjâ)

4. Ârya; the Path of the Holy Ones (Arhats, Arahats, or Rahats). In this Path the Arhat is said to "see Nirvâna", and his state is thus described :

As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her son, her only son so let there be good will without measure among all beings. Let good will without measure prevail in the whole world, above, below, around, unstinted, unmixed with any feeling of differing or opposing interests. If a man remain steadfastly in this state of mind all the while he is awake, whether he be standing, walking, sitting or lying down, then is come to pass the saying "Even in this world holiness has been found". [Metta Sutta]

On this Path the Arhat comes into possession of the five great powers, of knowledge, Abhijñâs or Siddhis. These are:

1. Divyachakshus; the power of the divine eye, whereby is procured the sight of any object in any world (Loka) or on any plane of consciousness.
2. Divyashrotra; the divine ear, the ability to understand all sounds on every plane. [Page 18]
3. Riddhi-sâkshât-kriyâ; the power to assume any form or shape; manifestation (Sâkshât-kriyâ) of preternatural or occult power (Riddhi). Riddhi (Pâli, Iddhi; Mong., Riddhi Chubilghan) is the same as the

Chinese logogram signifying " a body (transmutable) at will," and explained by Eitel as meaning:

(1) Possession of a [subtle] body which is exempt from the laws of gravitation and space, and (2) power to assume any shape or form and to traverse space at will.

4. Pûrva-nivésa-jnâna or Pûrva-nivâsânusmriti, knowledge of all prior incarnations of oneself or others; lit., knowledge or memory of former tabernacles or dwellings.

5. Para-chitta-jñâna; intuitive knowledge of the minds of all other beings.

The Chinese categories generally add a sixth Abhijñâ, viz.:

6. Â-srava-kshaya; the Chinese equivalent meaning finality of the stream. Â-srava is taken to mean the "stream" of rebirth, and therefore the full meaning is said to be "supernal knowledge of the finality of the stream of life".

The Occult Schools are said to reckon seven of these transcendent faculties.

Spence Hardy, in speaking of the power of the "divine eye", says:

The lowest power is to be able to see things that are in existence at the time when it is exercised; but the being who possesses this power may not be able to see that which has only existed at some previous period, and has passed away or been destroyed; and he may not be able to discern objects at the very instant of their formation, from their being so exceedingly minute or momentary. It will, perhaps be said that this degree of power is of no benefit; but its value is great, as it enables the possessor to see the thoughts of others, and to know the consequences of any course of action, whether it be good or evil, so as to be able to tell what kind of birth will be next received

All beings who possess this wisdom, when they look at the past, do not see the same number of previous births. The extent of the number seen varies according to the merit of the individual.[Op. cit, 284-285]

But in spite of the attainment of these perfections the Rahat is still subject to physical pain; as Nâgasena says to King Milinda in the Milinda-prashna:

The branches of a tree are shaken by the storm; but the trunk remains unmoved. In like manner, as the mind of the Rabat is bound to the firm pillar of Samâdhi by the cord of the four paths, it remains unmoved, even when the body is suffering pain. [Hardy, *ibid.* p 288]

But in order to tread these Paths in safety there is one indispensable practice, the means whereby the Buddha himself finally [Page 19] reached enlightenment, and that is "Right Contemplation". This is as far removed from unbalanced mystic dreaming, uncontrolled astralism or irresponsible mediumistic development, as are the peaks of Meru from the depths of Pâtâla. The four and seven Dhyânic stages are a stupendous development of the spiritual will that can only be attained to by the unwearied practice of many births. Some of the esoteric stages are occasionally hinted at, but in the present notes we must be content with the exoteric expositions.

J. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, in his *Le Bouddha et sa Religion*, gives us the following description of the four degrees of Dhyâna, according to the "Sûtras of Nepâl and Ceylon", but without any more explicit citation of authority.

The first degree of Dhyâna is the intimate feeling of happiness which is born in the soul of the ascetic when he thinks that he has at last arrived at a profound distinction between the nature of things. The ascetic is then detached from every other desire but that of Nirvâna; he still exercises his discrimination and reason, but he is freed from all conditions of sin and vice: and the contemplation of Nirvâna, for which he hopes and to which he draws nigh, throws him into an ecstasy which enables him to pass into the second degree.

In this second stage, the purity of the ascetic remains the same; vice and sin do not soil him; but in addition, he has put on one side discrimination and reason; and his intellect, which no longer thinks of other things, but is fixed on Nirvâna alone, only feels the bliss of interior contentment, without discriminating or even comprehending it.

In the third degree, the bliss of contentment has disappeared; the sage has fallen into indifference even with regard to the happiness which his intellect was but lately experiencing. All the bliss which remains for him is a vague feeling of physical well-being into which his whole body is plunged. He has not, however, lost the memory of the states through which he has just passed, and he has still a confused consciousness of himself, in spite of the almost complete detachment which he has reached,

Finally, in the fourth degree, the ascetic no longer experiences this feeling of physical well-being, indistinct as it is; he has also lost all memory; more, he has even lost the feeling of his indifference; and henceforth free from every pleasure and every pain, no matter what its object may be, whether objective or subjective, he reaches a state of impassibility which is the nearest possible to that of Nirvâna in this life. Moreover, this perfect impassibility does not prevent the ascetic from acquiring even at this moment omniscience and magic power

To the four degrees of Dhyâna, Buddhism adds four superior, or, if you will, corresponding degrees; these are "the four regions of the formless world". The ascetic who has courageously passed through the first four stages is rewarded by entering into the region of the infinity of space. Thence he mounts a fresh degree, into the region of the infinity of intelligence. Arrived at this height, he reaches a third region, where nothing exists. But as in this void and darkness it might be supposed that at least an idea remains which represents to the ascetic the void itself into which he is plunged, a last and supreme effort is necessary, and the [Page 20] fourth region of the formless world is entered, where there are no longer either ideas, or even an idea of the absence of ideas. [*Op cit.* pp 136-137.]

It is said that those who are treading the Path, when they feel the span of their present life drawing to a close, perform Tapas, or, in other words, pass into these stages of meditation. For by means of this practice they have already learned to separate themselves from this lower material vehicle at will, during life, and so have conquered the terrors of death long before the final order comes from Karma. Thus it was that Shâkya-muni passed away, and the stages of meditation or Dhyâna (Pâli, Jhâna) are described as follows in the closing scene of the Buddha's life, as recorded in the *Mahâ-pari-nibbâna Sutta*, Chapter vi:

10. Then the Blessed One addressed the brethren, and said: "Behold now, brethren, I exhort you, saying, 'Decay is inherent in all component things I Work out your salvation with diligence'".

This was the last word of the Tathâgata !

11. Then the Blessed One entered into the first stage of deep meditation. And rising out of the first stage he passed into the second. And rising out of the second he passed into the third. And rising out of the third stage he passed into the fourth. And rising out of the fourth stage of deep meditation he entered into the state of mind to which the infinity of space is alone present. And passing out of the mere consciousness of the infinity of space he entered into the state of mind to which the infinity of thought is alone present. And passing out of the mere consciousness of the infinity of thought he entered into a state of mind to which nothing at all was specially present. And passing out of the consciousness of no special object he fell into a state between consciousness and unconsciousness. And passing out of the state between consciousness and unconsciousness he fell into a state in which the consciousness both of sensations and of ideas had wholly passed away.

12. Then the venerable Ânanda said to the venerable Anuruddha: "O my Lord, O Anuruddha, the Blessed One is dead !"

"Nay ! brother Ânanda, the Blessed One is not dead. He has entered into that state in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be !"

13. Then the Blessed One, passing out of the state in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be, entered into the state between consciousness and unconsciousness. And passing out of the state between consciousness and unconsciousness he entered into the state of mind to which nothing at all is specially present. And passing out of the consciousness of no special object he entered into the state of mind to which the infinity of thought is alone present. And passing out of the mere consciousness of the infinity of thought he entered into the state of mind to which the infinity of space is alone present. And passing out of the mere consciousness of the infinity of space he entered into the fourth stage of deep meditation. And passing out of the fourth stage he entered into the third. And passing out of the third stage he entered into the second. And passing out of the second he entered into the first. And passing out of the first stage of deep meditation he entered into the second. And passing out of the second stage he entered [Page 21] into the third. And passing out of the third stage he entered into the fourth stage of deep meditation. And passing out of the last stage of deep meditation he immediately expired. [Rhys Davids' Translation, "Sacred Books of the East", vol. xi, pp 114-116]

In the preceding paragraphs a rough review of some of the exoteric sources of information open to those who are unable to read the original languages has been attempted. Needless to say that there is an enormous mass of matter yet untranslated, such as, for instance, the *Abhidhamma* — the largest of the Tripitaka, or " Three Baskets" of Buddhist scripture — which contains the metaphysical and psychological exposition of the supreme problem under discussion. As these scriptures are five times the size of the Bible, there is still much for us to wait for.

In the conclusion of this paper, however, a more difficult task has to be attempted, by collecting together the more distinct hints that can be gleaned from the writings of H. P. B. as to the nature of Nirvâna, according to the Esoteric Philosophy — or at least that comparatively small portion of it that H. P. B. was allowed to disclose. The difficulty is that H. P. B. has nowhere distinctly discussed the problem; we have no section, no chapter of a book, no article of a magazine, from her pen devoted to the subject. The short note in *The Theosophical Glossary* is far from consoling to the eager student, and runs as follows:

Nirvâna is the state of absolute existence and absolute consciousness, into which the Ego of a man who has reached the highest degree of perfection and holiness during life, goes, after the body dies, and occasionally, as in the case of Gautama Buddha and others, during life.

This is far less explicit than H. P. B.'s earlier statements, of which, perhaps, the following editorial note in *The Theosophist* (v. 246) is the clearest:

Ordinarily a man is said to reach Nirvâna when he evolves into a Dhyân Chohan. The condition of a Dhyân Chohan is attained in the ordinary course of nature, after the completion of the Seventh Round in the present Planetary Chain. After becoming a Dhyân Chohan, a man does not, according to the law of nature, incarnate in any of the other Planetary Chains of this Solar System. The whole Solar System is his home. He continues to discharge his duties in the government of this Solar System until the time of Solar Pralaya, when his Monad, after a period of rest, will have to overshadow in another Solar System a particular human being during his successive incarnations, and attach itself to his higher principles when he becomes a Dhyân Chohan in his turn. There is progressive spiritual development in the innumerable Solar Systems of the infinite Cosmos. Until the time of Cosmic Pralaya, the Monad will continue to act in the manner above indicated, and it is only during the inconceivable period of Cosmic Sleep which follows the present period of activity, that the highest condition of Nirvâna is realized.

Here we have a hint that the degrees of Nirvâna are as infinite as the [Page 22] Solar Systems in Cosmos, and that, therefore, the idea is not such a simple and ultimate fact as exoteric scriptures, whether Hindû or Buddhist, would lead us to suppose. Nature, in even the grandest stages of her development, does not leap, but proceeds with orderly law. From the point of view of the Esoteric Philosophy, union with Parabrahman — in the actual ultimate sense of the term — is as absurd as the Protestant Christian idea of approaching directly to Deity without intermediaries. In order to make the matter practical, Parabrahman must be taken as a symbol of the Solar Logos. This does not in the slightest sense belittle the ideal — for not even the most transcendental and stupendous concept the human mind can form of Parabrahman can approach by many a plane to the *actuality* of the Real Being of the Solar Logos.

H. P. B. in speaking of this degree of Nirvâna uses the term "ordinarily", and this leads us to suppose that there are other stages leading up to the Solar Nirvâna; all the more so, as Laya is given as a synonym of the term in *The Secret Doctrine*, and if there are degrees of Laya then it would follow that there are corresponding degrees of Nirvâna. This is, however, a very difficult subject, and we must beware of letting our speculations run away with us.

Now, what is Laya; and how is it identified with Nirvâna ?

Ordinarily it is the zero-point of differentiation between two planes or states, or, in a more particular sense, of the matter of a Globe, Chain, System, etc. It is identified with Nirvâna in the following passages of *The Secret Doctrine*:

Laya is, in fact, the Nirvânic dissociation of all substances, merged after a life-cycle into the latency of their primary conditions. It is the luminous but bodiless shadow of the Matter that was, the realm of negativeness — wherein lie latent during their period of rest the active forces of the universe. [i. 140.]

And again, H. P. B. speaks of:

Nirvâna — the vanishing point of differentiated Matter. [i. 177]

And further explains this as:

The ultimate quiescent state: the Nirvâna condition of the seventh principle. [i. 289, note]

In these passages, the microcosmic Âtmic condition is evidently referred to. That is to say, that whether in the case of a World or a Man — which are both microcosms compared to the Macrocosm, the Heavenly Man, or Ideal Cosmos — it is the Âtmic energy on the four lower planes of Cosmos. The Âtmic One Life is that into which the energies of the four lower planes of "differentiated Matter" melt. On these four lower planes are the seven aspects of Âtmâ, whether regarded as Globes in the case of a Planetary Chain or as "Principles" in that of Man. [Page 23]

Now how do these "aspects" arise? It is Fohat, the Light of the Logos, the Creative and Emanative Energy of Âtmâ, " the Swift and Radiant One" who, in the words of the Book of Dzyan:

Produces the seven Laya centres, against which none will prevail till the Great Day "Be With Us". [i. 138]

Now these Laya centres are called "centres" for lack of a better name. They are not points, not even mathematical points, [i.145] but conditions. They are only centres in so far as they are connected with the Fohatic Power, which is described in various places as vortical, a " fiery whirlwind", moving in a spiral, annular, "zig-zag" path. There are then seven great Laya Centres, but each one of them on its own plane is a centre within every atom of that "Plane", "Globe", "Principle", etc..

Elsewhere, H. P. B. thus describes the energizing of Fohat:

For formative or creative purposes, the *Great Law* (Theists may call it God) stops, or rather *modifies* its perpetual motion on seven invisible points *within the area of the Manifested Universe*. [i.147]

"Perpetual motion" is the term applied to the Great Breath when on the lower four planes of the *ideal* Cosmos, referred to above as "the area of the Manifested Universe".

In the words of the *Occult Catechism*:

The Great Breath digs through Space seven holes into Laya to cause them [Worlds, Globes, etc.] to circumgyrate during Manvantara.

Upon which H. P. B. proceeds to comment as follows:

We have said that Laya is what Science may call the zero-point or line; the real of absolute negativeness, or the one real absolute Force, the *noumenon* of the Seventh State of that which we ignorantly call and recognize as "Force". [i,148]

After speaking of Absolute Laya, " the root and basis of all states of objectivity and also subjectivity", H. P. B. refers to it as "*the neutral axis, not one of the many aspects, but its centre*". That is to say, that the seven Laya Centres, or, to phrase it differently, the seven vortices sunk into Laya, are "aspects" of the one Great Creative Force, the Âtmic Energy.

Continuing her explanation, H. P. B. proceeds:

It may serve to elucidate the meaning, if we try to imagine a "neutral centre" — the dream of those who would discover perpetual motion. A "neutral centre" is, in one aspect, the limiting point of any set of senses. Thus, imagine two consecutive planes of matter; each of these corresponding to an appropriate set of perceptive organs. We are forced to admit that between these two planes of matter an incessant circulation takes place: and if we follow the atoms and molecules of, say, the lower in their transformation upwards, they will come to a point where they pass altogether beyond the range of the faculties we are using on the lower plane. [Page 24]

In fact, for us the matter of the lower plane there vanishes from our perception — or rather, it passes on to the higher plane, and the state of matter corresponding to such a point of transition must certainly possess special, and not readily discoverable, properties. Seven such "Neutral Centres" then are produced by Fohat.

The above quotations give us some idea of the nature of these Laya conditions between Planes, Globes, etc., but it is impossible for us to distinguish the degrees of Laya from each other. All are Nirvânic states of consciousness for some entity or other, but we have not sufficient exoteric data to decide the matter

more precisely. That "none shall prevail against" the seven great Laya Centres or aspects of Absolute Laya, until the Great Day "Be With Us" is the statement of the *Book of Dzyan*. But we should be careful not to take such statements in too material a sense. For though the "Great Day" corresponds to a Solar Pralaya and so on up to the Cosmic Pralâya, nevertheless its mystery may also be unlocked by the key of Initiation, where the Day "Be With Us" would stand for the Final Initiation when the Candidate is clothed in his triple Nirvânic Vesture. Clad in the triple Âtmic radiance of the Logos, the Perfected Man can then pass at liberty and in full consciousness through the Laya Centres that shut off the consciousness of ordinary man into seven great states, which he cannot unite while he is sucked into their vortices through desire for external sensation.

We should also remember that the great septenary differentiation of consciousness is caused by the Magic Power of the Great Mind — the Logos. It is this great septenary "suggestion" of the Mâyâ of the Logos, that causes us little men to think there is separateness, and we cannot remove the "suggestion" of the "Great Hypnotizer" until we become one with him, for he is our SELF.

The above ideas are well summed up in the following passage :

In Pralaya, or the intermediate period between two Manvantaras, it (the Monad) loses its name, as it loses it when the real *One Self* of man merges into Brahm in cases of high Samâdhi (the Turîya state) or final Nirvâna; "when the disciple", in the words of Shankara, "having attained that primeval consciousness, absolute bliss, of which the nature is truth, which is without form and action, abandons this illusive body that has been assumed by the Âtmâ just as an actor (abandons) the dress (put on)". For Buddhi (the Ânanda-maya Sheath) is but a mirror which reflects absolute bliss; and, moreover, that *reflection* itself is yet not free from ignorance, and is *not* the Supreme Spirit, being subject to conditions, being a spiritual modification of Prakriti, and an effect; Âtma alone is the one real and eternal substratum of all — the essence and absolute knowledge — the Kshetrajña. ["Knower of the 'field'" — or knower of the lower vehicles] It is called, in the Esoteric Philosophy, the "One Witness", and while it rests in Devachan, is referred to as the "Three Witnesses to Karma". [*The Secret Doctrine*, i, 570] [Page 25]

As, in the Esoteric Philosophy, there are seven kinds of Laya, so there are seven degrees of Pralaya, or dissolution of a thing into its original element or condition. This is quite reconcilable with the exoteric Paurânik fourfold division, by remembering that the seven are in the fourfold Manifested Universe or, in other words, on the four lower planes of the ideal Cosmos. We will first of all take a glance at the exoteric classification, and then see whether we have sufficient hints to make out the sevenfold division from *The Secret Doctrine*.

There are, then, four kinds of dissolution or Pralaya mentioned in the Purânas. They are called (i) Naimittika, (2) Prâkritika, (3) Âtyantika, and (4) Nitya. Colonel Vans Kennedy explains these as:

1. Naimittika takes place when Brahmâ slumbers.
2. Prâkritika, when the Universe returns to its original nature.
3. Atyantika proceeds from divine knowledge, and consequent identification with the Supreme Spirit.

4. Nitya is the extinction of life in sleep at night. [*Researches into the Nature and Affinity of Ancient and Hindû Mythology*, p 224, note]

Wilson, however, describes these Pralayas as:

The first is called Naimittika, "occasional", or "incidental", or Brâhmya, as occasioned by the intervals of Brahmâ's days; the destruction of creatures, though not of the substance of the world, occurring during his night. The general resolution of the elements into their primitive source, or Prakriti, is the Prâkritika destruction, and occurs at the end of Brahmâ's age. The third, the absolute or final, Âtyantika, is individual annihilation; [Fitzedward Hall criticizes this expression of Wilson. "The emancipation of the Hindûs", he says, is not release 'from all existence', but from consciousness of pleasure and pain. The distinction is, at all events, good, as a piece of idealism" – *Vishnu Purâna*, Wilson's Trans, v 61] Moksha, exemption for ever from future existence. The Bhâdgavata mentions the fourth kind — Nitya, or constant dissolution; explaining it to be the imperceptible change that all things suffer in the various stages of growth and decay, life and death, [*Vishnu Purâna*, Wilson's Trans, v. 186]

H. P. B. mentions five different kinds of Pralaya in *The Secret Doctrine*: [i.172]

1. Between two Globes.
2. ,, ,, Rounds.
3. ,, ,, Planetary Chains.
4. ,, ,, Solar Systems.
5. ,, ,, Universes.

As H. P. B. speaks of the "Nirvâna . . . between two Chains", [Ibid p 173] we may suppose that the periods of rest between Globes and Rounds are minor Nirvânas. She further describes the Âtyantika and Nitya Pralayas as:

The individual Pralaya or Nirvâna; after having reached which there is no [Page 26] more future existence possible, no rebirth till after the Mahâpralaya ; . . . the Nitya or constant dissolution . . . (is) the change which takes place imperceptibly in everything in this Universe, from the globe down to the atom — without cessation.[Ibid. i.371]

Later on [Ibid, ii. 309, note] we read the following comment on the Paurânik category:

The dissolution of all things is of four kinds, Parâshara is *made to say* [*i.e.*, it is really sevenfold] — Naimittika (Occasional) when Brahmâ slumbers (his Night, when, "at the end of his Day, occurs a re-coalescence of the Universe, called Brahmâ's contingent re-coalescence", because Brahmâ is this Universe itself); Prâkritika (Elemental), when the return of this Universe to its original nature is partial and physical; Âtyantika (Absolute), identification of the *embodied* with the incorporeal Supreme Spirit — Mahâtmic state, whether temporary or until

the following Mahâ Kalpa; also Absolute Obscuration — as of a whole Planetary Chain, etc.; and Nitya (Perpetual), Mahâpralaya for the Universe, Death — for man. Nitya is the extinction of life, like the "extinction of a lamp", also "in sleep at night", Nitya Sarga is "constant or perpetual creation", as Nitya Pralaya is "constant or perpetual destruction of all that is born".

Though this passage does not enable us to add precisely to the five distinct kinds of Pralaya mentioned in the note to page 172 of the first volume, it, nevertheless, adds some interesting items of information.

Moreover, the intellectual comprehension of these dissolutions as taking place externally is but the first step to the realization of the matter as pertaining to the Inner Man. Knowledge and realization, from the point of view of practical Occultism, pertain to the *Within*, and if we do not sense these things within as changes of condition in the Self which are independent of external time, we shall be far from grasping the real truth. Universes, Systems, Planets, Globes, and the rest, are all within our own nature, all contained in us. And though *The Secret Doctrine* tells us little of Nirvâna from the individual point of view, according to the key of Yoga, we can, nevertheless, work out the problem by analogy by converting the phenomena of the external universe into terms of the internal noumena of the Self. We shall thus be able to appreciate such a statement as:

When Buddhi absorbs our Ego-tism (destroys it) with all its Vikâras, Avalokiteshvara becomes manifested to us and Nirvâna or Mukti is reached. [*The Secret Doctrine*, Volume 1, xix]

That is to say when Buddhi, the Light of the Logos — Avalokiteshvara, or Âtmâ — absorbs our *Ego-tism* (Ahamkâra, the I-making faculty of Manas, the True Individuality, which is not destroyed but identified with its Source) then the Vision Glorious of the "Lord who looks down from above" [Ava-lokita means "seen" and Îshvara "Lord". In one sense, Ava-lokiteshvara signifies the Manifested Logos or Mahat] is sensed by the "Opened Eye" of the Seer. The Vi-kâras are "changes of [Page 27] form" or "deviations from any natural state"; literally they are "makings apart", "differentiations" — the root of separateness.

Thus it is that:

Bodhi [corresponding to Buddhi] is ... the name of a particular state of trance condition, called Samadhi, during which the subject reaches the culmination of spiritual knowledge. [*Ibid*]

In previous articles on "*The Great Renunciation*", "*The World-Soul*", and "*The Vestures of the Soul*", I have dwelt on that highest possible conception of self-sacrifice contained in the Doctrine of the Renunciation of Nirvâna by the Buddhas of Compassion for better service to the race, and on the nature of the Nirvânic Robes of Initiation; all of which may be read in *The Voice of the Silence*. In the present paper, therefore, I shall not attempt to say anything further on this the grandest of all doctrines that mortal ears can dare to hear. But we should never forget that here we have a teaching which, if the Esoteric Philosophy had given no other, would constitute an ideal which dwarfs all others into insignificance. It gives cause to marvel that the "cold heart" of humanity has not yet more fully welcomed the warmth of this ray from the Cosmic Sun — the Heart of the Heavenly Man. Doubtless the reason is that it is too high for the general, who have shown themselves so strongly moved by far lesser ideals. The sunlight streams down upon our "cities of the dead" and the "corpses" hide themselves away behind the walls of prejudice, and scepticism, lust and materiality that they have built, for they know that if but a solitary ray

fall upon the "bud of the lotus", in the heart, it will swell and expand and grow, and then good-bye to their "dead" pleasures and the charnel-house they love so dearly.

But we must hasten to conclusion, and no fitter ending to these Notes could be chosen than the opening Stanzas of Dzyan, which describe the Nirvânic State of the Universe, before manifestation. And describing the Nirvânic State of the Universe they also describe the Nirvânic State of Man, when his seven "Principles" have blended into one, and united themselves with their Parents, the seven Rays of the Logos, on the Great Day "Be With Us", for it is they who speak these mysterious words to their child, who becomes greater than the sevenfold Parent. Then there is no Limit, no Ring "Pass Not" — all is One in the Supreme Completion, the Plerôma of Plerômas — Para-nish-panna. [Lit, Para=supreme, and Nish-panna=completion, perfection]

Time is not, for it lies asleep in the Infinite Bosom of Duration. Universal Mind is not, for there are no Ah-hi to contain it.

There are no Ah-hi, for the "Seven Ways to Bliss", the "Seven Sublime Lords and the Seven Truths", which are identical, are withdrawn into their Source, the Eternal Parent. The Seven Rays of the [Page 28] Logos are One. The Mahâ Chohan has withdrawn the seven Dhyânîs, the seven Principles of his Divine Nature, into himself.

Darkness alone fills the Boundless All, for Father, Mother, and Son are once more One.

Darkness — not our darkness, but the dark, Unmanifested, dark to us because of our spiritual ignorance — Dark Space, the Father of Bright Space, the Younger, the Son, who shines forth only when the order "Fiat Lux" is given at the Dawn of Manifestation. Father, Mother, and Son are one; Spirit, Matter, and the Universe are one; and Âtmâ, Buddhi and Manas blend in unity.

Alone, the One Form of Existence stretches boundless, infinite, causeless, in Dreamless Sleep; and Life pulsates unconscious in Universal Space, throughout the All-Presence.

Unconscious — in our sense of consciousness, for it transcends all consciousness.

Where is Silence ? Where are the ears to sense it ? No, there is neither Silence nor Sound; naught save Ceaseless Eternal Breath, which knows itself not.

Ceaseless Eternal Breath — Âtmâ alone, One — no second. It knows Itself not, for if there were an object of knowledge, there would no longer be Unity — and in Nirvâna, knowledge is identification with Self.

What more need be said? These are great Truths. How lightly does the opinion of ephemeral Science and Theology weigh in the scale against such sublime verities !

Wake, then, remember thy SELF, and hear the words of the Flame (the Inner God) to the Spark (Man).

"Thou art myself, my image and my shadow. I have clothed myself in thee, and thou art my Vahan [Vehicle] to the Day ' Be With Us', when thou shalt rebecome myself and others, thyself and I".