MEDITATION IN CONTEMPORARY SRI LANKA: IDEA AND PRACTICE

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This paper is based on research material gathered in Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) during a preparatory study of contemporary meditation practices. Specifically, a series of open-ended interviews was conducted with forty-five persons who were particularly well versed in Buddhist matters. In addition, monks and lay persons, who were said to be seriously involved in the Buddhist life, were visited and interviewed. The author also participated as a lay disciple (upasaka) in the life of a meditation monastery for one month. In this case, the experiential approach went beyond the concern for collecting data, as it implied and expressed a personal commitment.

The forty-five respondents do not constitute a random sample representative of the Buddhist population in Sri Lanka. Rather, they were selected on the basis of their presumed competence. The educational background of this group included 19 persons at the university level, 21 currently in institutions of Buddhist higher education, and 5 at the high school level. Socially, 9 were lay persons (8 men, 1 woman) and 36 were monks (29 'active' and 7 'meditative' monks). The language of the interview was English in 24 cases, and Sinhalese in 21 cases.

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The interviews covered five topics: 1) the differences between monks and laymen regarding the aims to be attained in this and subsequent lives, and the means to be used; 2) the various categories of monks, and their applied meanings; 3) the distinction implied by the words 'worldly' and 'non-worldly'; 4) the different kinds of meditation and their significant features; and 5) the religious and/or philosophical character of Buddhism.

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF MEDITATION

This study is concerned with Buddhism as it is practiced, understood, and expressed today by those who are deeply involved in it. Systems for living and thinking generally give rise to adherence of varying degrees, from lukewarm acceptance to total commitment. For our purposes, however, we wish to focus attention on the ideational and behavioral life styles of those Sinhalese who seriously follow the Buddha's teachings. As such, they are most likely to be a minority and may even exhibit some characteristics of an elite. In a predominantly Buddhist society as in Sri Lanka, such followers are recognized as exemplary. Thus the forty-five informants were chosen on the assumption that they would most likely be able to identify an exemplary Buddhist and could amply articulate this ideal.

Bhavana is usually translated as 'meditation', although, according to Rahula (1959), it is better rendered by 'mental culture'. Etymology supports this interpretation (from the Sanskrit root bhii, becoming, changing, developing) as well as the practices connoted by that term. It does not take long to realize that meditation is recognized as the core of the Buddhist way of life. Thirty-six of 42 respondents who commented on meditation consider it to be the essential practice of exemplary Buddhists. On the other hand, the same group of informants believe that very few persons actually practice meditation on a regular basis.

This is a paradoxical situation: the discrepancy between the affirmation of meditation as essential and its perception as minimally practiced cannot be accounted for by the usual difference between what one should do and what one does. For the mass of Sinhalese, Buddhism is a very important matter. The quiet crowds, who attend ritual observances in the temples' enclosures during the full moon and who gather to spend the night at the local chanting ceremonies (pirit), manifest a sincere and deep devotion. Lay Buddhists generously support...
more than 21,000 monks and 7,000 temples, indicating their willingness to make material sacrifices for the maintenance of Buddhism. The respect displayed by lay men and women when greeting monks expresses a high appreciation for the Buddhist community (sangha) which is symbolized by the yellow robe. All this gives the impression that Buddhism is taken seriously by the Sinhalese society as a whole. Nevertheless, meditation, held to be essential, remains largely unpracticed.

Another strange discrepancy appears in opinions regarding the aims and goals of life. Complete liberation (nibbana) is the ultimate aim of life for monks as well as for laymen (according to 41 of 45 respondents; the other four did not comment on that topic). Obituaries in Sri Lanka newspapers confirm this: the last wish of relatives and friends is that the departed may reach nibbana. Curiously however, only 6 of 41 respondents believed that liberation can be reached in the present life or in the next rebirths. The two apparent paradoxes—what meditation is essential and little practiced, and that liberation is the ultimate goal of life, but inaccessible in the near future—are related in that meditation is the necessary means for attaining liberation.

In the prevailing view of contemporary Sinhalese Buddhists, liberation from the recurring cycles (samsara) of birth, growing up, getting old, and dying cannot be expected for persons currently living until there have been countless repetitions of the process. This tends to make the serious pursuit of liberation psychologically meaningless, although the theoretical possibility of reaching liberation in this life is recognized. It would require, indeed, an extraordinary strength to commit oneself totally to the quest of a liberation that cannot possibly be realized before thousands of rebirths.

Meditation is thus seen as essential and necessary, but its practice can be postponed indefinitely. Meanwhile, one can improve the probability of having a long, rewarding present life and a higher rebirth by devotional practices which accumulate positive merits. In this sense the paradox is resolved.

For many Buddhists, the worldly order (samsara) has its rewards and its happiness. They do not see the two aims—a 'good rebirth' and liberation—as exclusive, but as hierarchical. The former is a proximate goal, the latter, the non-Worldly order (nibbana), is the ultimate goal. One may remain in the cycle of the world, and somehow 'enjoy it' without giving up the in-
tention of pursuing the ultimate goal of liberation in some later rebirth. This distinction between orders is not only a speculation of philosophers, but a meaningful duality in the common experience of Sinhalese Buddhists. Without it they could not reconcile the pursuit of liberation through meditation with the accumulation of merits through devotion.

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

Meditation is nevertheless practiced in contemporary Sri Lanka. Practitioners either have the fortitude to devote their present energy to the pursuit of an indefinitely distant goal or they meditate for the reasons indicated: 1) they believe that liberation may be reached in a near future (6 of 41 respondents); 2) they want to secure the secondary effects of meditation such as control of one's mind (10 of 33 respondents); 3) they wish to control their affectivity (5 of 33 respondents); 4) they desire relief from worries and mental health (5 of 33 respondents); 5) they want power (2 of 33 respondents).

Who does meditate regularly? Ordinary lay men and women are supposed to meditate regularly on the monthly Day of Veneration (poya), but only 3 of 42 informants think they do. Some lay persons go much further than the poya meditation. Laymen (UPIsaka) and laywomen (UPasika), often in their late middle age, commit themselves to the temporary practice of the Eight or Ten Precepts (de Silva, 1974; Obeyesekere, 1968; Piyadassi, 1964). Usually this is done in a temple, but some pursue an intensive training period in a meditation monastery and then continue their practice at home.

Another status of laymen is defined as the 'homeless' (anagari&ra). Such a person is committed, on a long range basis, to an ascetic life of renunciation roughly equivalent to that of the monk. However, not being subject to the monastic discipline (he is not ordained), he is more free than the monk to engage in different activities. In discussing this role, Obeyesekere (1972) stresses the possibilities of "political, social service, and missionary activity" that are open to the 'homeless' and which have, in fact, been performed by the most famous modern example, the Anagarika Dharmapala (1965). Some laymen take advantage of the anagari&ra's 'freedom' (he has no pastoral duties) to become more deeply involved in meditation practice and teaching. There are also some laymen who, without the anagari&ra status, privately lead an austere life of sexual abstinence and meditation.
forest dwelling monks

For monks, direct questions regarding their actual practice is usually inappropriate. As Gombrich (1971) notes, "The question is so involved with a monk's prestige, possibly even with his self-respect, that honesty is hardly possible." (Fortunately, some government data may be used for a rough assessment.) Those monks whose life style is most congenial to the practice of meditation are the forest-dwelling monks *ivanaviisi* or *aranavasi*) who stand in contrast to the village or town-dwelling monks (*gramavasi*). The dichotomy is ancient: From about the 6th century A.D. the forest-dwellers are referred to as a distinct group, though not a separate sect (Rahula, 1956). This pair of words is still used today in common language as well as in Government reports (such as the statistics of the Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Cultural Affairs). This agency reports the ratio of *gramavasit'anavasit* to be 97.05%/12.95% in 1972. It does not seem that, as Gombrich (1971) asserts, this "dichotomy has for the most part lapsed into meaningless scholasticism." The forest-dwellers listed in official statistics still conform to the canonical distance of five hundred bow-lengths from the nearest village, according to the Department of Religious Affairs.

The monks living in towns and villages perform priestly duties such as holding ceremonies meant to obtain protection against evil forces, and aid in securing health and prosperity. They also conduct cremation rituals and preach. Teaching is another function of many urban monks both in Buddhist high schools and in village elementary schools. A third traditional role of the *gramavasi* is to be advisor and even leader in matters of concern to the villagers. This involvement in local affairs has expanded into visible political activity for a number of monks in Sri Lanka. As Rahula (1974) states, after national independence (1948), "more and more Buddhist monks were attracted to social reform and welfare activities." To complete the picture of the *gramavasi's* activities, it should be added that some of them are specialists in astrology and herbal medicine. They practice these arts at the request of individuals who consult them, and for a fee or donation.

Because of these different activities-pastoral, teaching, advisory, political, and professional-urban monks may be said to be 'active' monks. This is the primary meaning that the term *gramaviisi* currently conveys. The etymological meaning, 'dwelling in a Village', has somewhat receded into the background. This kind of busy life filled with social interactions generates the same kinds of obstacles which prevent ordinary laymen from progressing in 'mental culture'. (In this discussion 'meditation' obviously refers to 'sitting meditation' or any
mental exercise that excludes the simultaneous performance of another activity. Some persons are certainly able to meditate while attending other functions, but it is a high achievement very unlikely at a beginner's stage.) On the basis of institutional information it is surmised that town-dwelling or urban monks (gramavasi) are not regular meditators, and it was often explained to the author that they do not have the necessary time.

SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD MONKS

How are meditators and presumed meditators (the forest-dwelling monks) regarded in contemporary Sri Lanka? Before attempting to answer this question, it is relevant to introduce another distinction, still more ancient than gramavasi vanavisi: the ganthadhura/vipassanadhura dichotomy. This refers to monks having the burden, or the duty, of the scriptures, as opposed to those having the duty of insight meditation. This distinction emerged in the 1st century B.C., when the Buddhist canon (Tipitaka) was compiled and written down. The assembled monks of Lanka decided, after a debate, that “For the stability of religion,” scholarship was more important than practice and liberation (Nyanamoli, 1964; Rahula, 1956, 1974). This assessment, made twenty centuries ago, is repeated frequently by the active monks of today. Yet, the scholarship/meditation dichotomy is not equivalent to the action/meditation one. What has been construed as common in scholarship and action is service to the Sinhalese society: study preserves the doctrine and makes it available to the succeeding generations, while social and political action benefits the whole society. From that point of view, the two traditional oppositions, scholarship/meditation and action/meditation, are reduced to the more familiar service-to-others/self-realization. This formulation is expressed, or at least suggested by "modern Buddhist monk-writers," as Bechert (1974) calls them.

Returning to the question of how forest-dwelling monks are regarded in contemporary Lanka, two distinct images of the vanavadi emerge. Those who start from the service/ realization opposition give priority to service. "Buddhism is based on service to others.... A true Buddhist should have the strength to sacrifice his own liberation for the sake of others" (Rahula, 1974). In an article significantly titled "Calling for a Positive Role for Bhikkhus in the National Leadership," the Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara (1974) writes: "A leadership programme was initiated by the Buddha as soon as his first sixty disciples had attained Arahatship .... The motive and aim un-
derlying the Buddha's request to his first sixty disciples is nothing but the idea of social service." In this perspective, the image of the forest monk is not very appealing. According to Rahula (1974), the monk is an individual "concerned only with his own happiness and salvation, unmindful of whatever happens to others; (...) he lives a) meaningless and lazy life both in respect of himself and of others, which is just another burden to the country and the nation."

A contrasting image may be drawn from talks with practicing laymen and meditation-oriented monks. Vanavîsi are seen as hermits, leading the silent and solitary life of meditation conducive to detachment, and are on the only path to becoming an arahat, the man who has reached liberation (nibbana), the traditional ideal in Theravada Buddhism. The hermit paradigm is still strong in the minds of contemporary Sinhalese. As I have attempted to demonstrate in another paper (Maquet, 1975) the space arrangement of a monastery built in 1956 seems to have been influenced by the model of the cave, the traditional hermit's abode, and the daily schedule includes more seclusion than communal life. The dwellings of the forest monks have names with simple etymological meanings (forest-temple, lodgings, ascetic place) and are usually translated as 'hermitages'. But they are not all hermitages in the sense of dwellings of solitary individuals. Out of the 170 forest-monastic establishments listed in Government statistics, 76 are occupied by a single monk (bhikkhu), 26 by two, and 23 by three; thus 125/170 forest lodgings (73%) are hermitages or quasi-hermitages. Twenty forest settlements are inhabited by four or five monks (12%), and 25 have six to thirty-six residents (15%). Where there are several monks, they usually have caves or cells distant from one another, and their communal life is extremely limited. It may be said that the life style of a forest bhikkhu is that of the recluse.

The evident asceticism of these forest-dwellers is respected and admired by lay people. They do not seem to be negatively impressed by the 'egoistic' aspects of the pursuit of liberation. The social value of this small minority -3% of the total number of monks - is surprisingly important: they demonstrate the 'credibility' of the non-worldly order dedicated to liberation. For lay Sinhalese, the arahat remains the ideal model of all monks. It is by conformity to that model that they assess the value of monks and measure their esteem. The author found laymen extremely interested in evaluating their monks, and very perceptive. As the forest-dweller is the closest approximation to the arahat's traditional image, he is more highly regarded than the active monk. These observations concur
with Obeyesekere's conclusions (1968) that "ultimately the layman's evaluation of any monk or upasakawill depend not on his formal status but on his personal piety, as measured by the arahatideal."

MEDITATION TRAINING

The fundamental book used today for meditation guidance is still the Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification) written by Buddhaghosa in the 5th century A.D. According to the Ven, Nyanamoli, its latest translator, the Visuddhimagga is "a detailed manual for meditation masters," which "systematically summarizes and interprets the teaching of the Buddha contained in the Pali Tipitaka," Though regarded as "a work of reference," the Visuddhimagga is of "rather intricate construction," and written in a scholastic and formalized language; it is relatively long, 838 pages in Nyanamoli's English translation (1964).

What has been called the Burmese Satipatthana method (Nyanaponika, 1962) is probably exercising more influence on contemporary meditators than the Visuddhimagga. It is not an alternative method: it stresses mindfulness (sati), which is also dealt with in the Visuddhimagga, and is expressed in more simple language. This method, elaborated at the beginning of the 20th century by the Burmese monk, U Narada, is a practical application of a canonical text, the Satipatthana Sutta (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness) which appears in two versions in the scriptures (Rhys Davids & Rhys Davids, 1910; Soma, 1967).

The training in meditation begins, according to this method, with the development of mindfulness. The beginner has to be constantly aware of his mental contents, observing them, and thus distant from them. For that purpose, he focuses his attention on a very simple and repetitive activity, such as breathing or walking. The process unfolds according to simple movements, and a few of them are noticed explicitly each time the activity is repeated—for instance, the upward movement of the abdomen where inhaling, and its downward movement when exhaling, or the upward, forward, and downward movements of the foot when walking. One simply makes a mental note of these elementary movements (such as 'rising' and 'falling' for the abdomen, and 'lifting', 'pushing', 'putting' for the walk). When ideas, memories, images, pleasant or unpleasant feelings, worries, physical pains, and other mental contents occur, one makes a brief mental note of them and then goes back to the breathing or walking exercise. The
meditator-apprentice aims at gaining a better awareness of his mental life without influencing it, without stopping it, and without examining it. By doing that, there is a constant distance maintained between the observing function and the observed stream of consciousness.

Being heedful of everything happening in one's consciousness is an attitude maintained beyond the first stage of apprenticeship, and, in fact, it is reinforced by specific exercises. But, under the guidance of the teacher, insight gradually evolves out of mindfulness. Insight (Pali: vipassīna, Skt: vidarsana, from the root drs, 'to see') is one of the two main types of meditation, the other being tranquility or concentration (samatha). This distinction among meditators is widely known and was spontaneously mentioned by 34 of 45 respondents.

Tranquility is an ancient path of meditation that was practiced even before the Buddha, and has continued to exist in the Hindu tradition as well. The meditator progresses through states of consciousness called absorptions (jhana). In the Visuddhimagga, eight states of increasing mental absorption are distinguished. They may be accompanied by highly pleasurable feelings of quiet joy, and by exceptional powers. The path of tranquility by itself, however, does not lead to liberation, so it must be supplemented by the path of insight, which is purely Buddhist. Fortunately, the very hard path of tranquility may be bypassed, and the meditator-apprentice may hope that the mindfulness practice will slowly shift into insight (Goleman, 1972).

The way of tranquility has certainly been chosen by a number of Sinhalese meditators and an 'educated guess' is that many forest-dwellers follow this very ancient path. On the other hand, insight meditation seems to appeal very much to younger monks and to lay persons.

EXPERIENCES DURING TRAINING

The Burmese monks who formulated the recent version of the mindfulness method established centers where it can be learned during a training period of four to six weeks. Sinhalese bhikkhu, after a sojourn in Burma, introduced similar centers in Sri Lanka. One of them is the meditation monastery of Kanduboda, founded for that purpose in 1956 by the Yen. Sumathipola Mahathera. At this institution, full time training is thought necessary to establish the basis for new mental habits.
The author's attempt to practice mindfulness exercises in sitting position for eight hours a day, or while walking up and down an ambulatory for four hours did not seem to have a spiritual significance, particularly at the beginning of the training period. The following personal diary entries may be helpful in illustrating various aspects of his training:

During today's talk with my teacher, I asked him how these repetitions of 'rising' and 'falling' lead to wisdom. He answered that to be aware of the origin, the growth, and the end of each respiration is wisdom. I don't understand (third day).

Concentration on each breathing process is exhausting. Sometimes I begin to experience breathing as a continued flow with ups and downs, like seaways. I am inclined to follow that metaphor; going back to 'rising' and 'falling' is frustrating (fifth day).

I asked him (the teacher) when I would begin to meditate on the First Noble Truth. He answered that by being mindful of the body one finds out by experience what is unsatisfactoriness or suffering (dukkha), that pain in the back when sitting in the lotus position is dukkha, and that meditation is not discursive reasoning (sixth day).

The meditator moves from mindfulness to insight when one of the three characteristics of reality imposes itself upon him. For the Theravada Buddhists, the three characteristics of reality are impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness or even suffering (dukkha), and the non-existence of self (anattii). These intuitions into the nature of reality do not result from discursive reasoning, but emerge unexpectedly from the meditator's attempts to be mindful of what happens in his stream of consciousness. These intuitions are accompanied by a very strong conviction based on direct perception. Thus, the rendering of intuitions in words, even the words of a diary, makes discursive what is not:

Sustained attention to breathing disintegrates ego. Though essential for living, breathing is not a process to which ego identifies. Focusing all one's attention on what is not the unique ego amounts to denying the importance of the ego. Ego is experienced as a distracting and badly controlled factor (13th day).

The teacher speaks as if there was a reality out there that can be perceived without distortion in meditation. It is a way of speaking. In fact meditation builds a certain reality, different from the one constructed by worldly existence. But this is not the time, nor the place for epistemological comments (14th day).
The monotony of life has a function here: not to provide anything on which to hook memories. The everyday routine is completely repetitive. The unique event that memory grasps is not experienced here. This weakens ego, as a good part of it is made up of memories (15th day).

This afternoon the teacher asks me if I like meditation. Strange question. My answer: "It depends. Sometimes I feel tense at the beginning, and would like to be at the end of the hour, or my back or legs hurt; sometimes I feel at peace, and time does not seem to matter." His reply: "You should not be attached to peace. Pleasant and unpleasant feelings come and go, and you do not control them. They are conditioned mental states (samkhara)" (16th day).

In the present empty context—no reading, no writing (except short entries in this diary), no talking (except the daily 15-minute guidance session with the teacher), no going around (except the formal procession to the refectory twice a day)—unconnected fragments of my past keep emerging and disappearing. Memory is an ego-building process: souvenirs are predicated on a permanent ego. But ego is no more than a grammatical subject to which are attributed causal chains of ideas and feelings. The fragility of the ego-construct can be experienced here because the meditation method prevents discursive and imaginative activities (18th day).

Impermanence of ego is experienced here as a vivid evidence. Ego amounts to the present body in constant entropy, a few memories that come and go and a few limited projects for a dubious future. To get detached from so little is perhaps a less formidable task than anticipated, Images and ideas, feelings and emotions enter and leave my field of consciousness, one linked to the other by trivial or bizarre associations. I do not perceive them as 'mine' any longer (22nd day).

Concentration on the rising and falling of each respiration gives in a few seconds the experience of birth, death, and rebirth of something, of everything, including my body. It is what my teacher calls 'seeing reality as it is'. The opposite of ignorance is not intellectual knowledge, but wisdom (panna): the experienced knowledge that reality is impermanent, the source of frustrations, and devoid of self (25th day).

New experience in meditation. I perceive everything from inside (eyelids, movements of the back, breathing, noises, position of hands) as if my body were empty. This slows down all movements, and is pleasant. The teacher tells me not to get attached to that pleasant experience (28th day).

From wisdom, one gradually shifts to detachment. Clinging to ego, things, and others begins to be experienced as childish. The arahat ideal makes sense: purified from ignorance and cravings, he is perfectly detached, thus mentally invulnerable to suffering, old age, and death (30th day).
Detachment is not indifference. The concern for others (mettii) remains but it is not any longer possessive, as are all the worldly loves, even the mother/child one (32nd day).

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Contemporary Theravada meditation is really a method of mental culture. It is entirely based on psychological techniques; there is no recourse to supernatural beings, such as the Hindu deities or the personal god of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, or to supernatural forces, such as grace or the divine. Devotion has no place in this meditation training. The usual cult edifices—the stupa (diigoba) with its enshrined relics, the bodhi tree, memorial of the Buddha’s enlightenment, and the vihiira, image hall with the Buddha’s statue—are situated in the semi-public area of the monastery where men and women from the village can freely come and worship. For those engaged in the meditation training—six monks and 15 upasaka, during the author’s month in residence—there was no ritual activity; even on the Veneration Day (poya) the routine remained unaltered, and visits were not made to the three sacred places of worship. The order of liberation and the order of devotion were behaviorally distinguished.

Although meditation is always an individual activity, instructions to beginners may be given collectively, and meditation may be practiced in common (as in a zendo in the Zen tradition). In Kanduboda, the instruction was private and individual: each trainee met the teacher every day for personal guidance. The practice was also pursued on a purely individual basis, except for three one-hour meditations scheduled for the whole monastery at the same time, but not at the same place. In spite of close physical proximity, the residents of the monastery did not constitute a communi/as where every member constantly interacts with the others in face-to-face relationships. In typical monastic communities, collective activities are numerous, but in Kanduboda the activities to be performed at the same time by everybody, and marked by a bell, are few: getting up (at 2:45 A.M.), two meals, three meditations. This leaves about 14 hours a day for each individual to organize according to his own responsibility. The monastery is thus a ‘facility’ serving a collection of persons who, individually, pursue similar goals.

The path of vipassaniĩs cognitive. It aims at removing ignorance and providing a clear understanding of the human condition—thus it is termed ‘the path of seeing’. It is the opposite of devotional paths where affectivity dominates. In devotional
implications of paths

methods (bhakti), there is love for and surrender to a presence perceived as distinct from the self. The ultimate aim is the union of the self with this presence. One consequence of the cognitive emphasis in vipassana is its austerity. Insight meditation requires a sustained and ceaseless effort in the silence and solitude of mental endeavors. Purification and detachment accompany the quest and grow with the progress of the advancing disciple, who is rewarded by peace and mental invulnerability in increasing measure. On the other hand, the 'affective' rewards of a 'loving presence' are not his.

The austere and solitary nature of the vipassanii path is clearly expressed by the space in which a meditator-apprentice spends about 23 hours out of every 24: a five-by-seven-foot cell and a 70-yard ambulatory (the two meals taken in the refectory account for the 24th hour of the day). This limited spatial setting is ideationally consistent with, and appropriate to, an intense, inward-directed mental pursuit.

The preceding description of the inner features of meditation practice—which is psychological and not supernatural, individual and not collective, cognitive and not affective—is based on a personal experience in one meditation monastery. Nevertheless, this description is in essential agreement with the tenets of the Theravada tradition and does not seem to be at variance with the authoritative accounts of Sinhalese Buddhism of which the author is aware. This is not surprising: vipassanii bhivana is certainly not a recent innovation and is found both in the canonical texts and in the Visuddhimagga.

Further, all 45 respondents agree that there is no Buddhist belief in a personal god or a soul. If religion is defined in terms of ritual as "a system of prayers, offerings, and practices," Buddhism is considered to be "a religion for the common man." The consensus of the respondents prefer to define Buddhism as a "way of life," and, as one informant said, "a line of thought and a path." There are no supernatural beings or forces whose action may be relevant to the attainment of liberation, even if it may be helpful in samsa\textacutera in the cycle of existences.

Finally, the Kanduboda training is not an adapted version meant for Westerners: they constitute a small minority of the trainees. During the author's brief stay, the residents of Kanduboda numbered 19 Sinhalese monks and 15 laymen (12 Sinhalese and 3 Westerners); 6 of the monks and all the laymen were undergoing the meditation training, thus 18 Sinhalese and 3 Westerners. The guest book, that only a minority of trainees were requested to sign, contained 90 entries for
17 years (1956-1973): 68 from Asian guests, and 22 from Westerners.

In contemporary Sri Lanka, meditation \( (bhavana) \) is a living part of the Buddhist heritage. For most of the heirs to the tradition it lives only as an idea, associated with an ultimate human aim, the indefinitely distant liberation from the cycle of existences, embodied by the ideal of the exemplary arahat. For a small number of Sinhalese today, meditation is still the essential and living practice of their chosen path.

REFERENCES


