

found in the described physiological advantages of zazen practice detailed by this author. He notes that the balance of consequences and challenges in brain functions correspond with a practice of physical discipline. We practitioners of meditation in various styles – insight, samadhi – interested in how and when brain functions can be fine-tuned in advanced levels of motor-performance, are closer to closing the gap.

Zen teachers differ in approaches to views of zazen: practices differ, individual student's practice with different intensity and direction, and the author suggests that meditators need to avoid getting wrapped up in meditative states. (pp. 124-125) He also warns that meditators need to work through, with qualified teachers, problems of distraction, excitement, dullness and sinking; warning: some degrees of happiness, clarity and unusual energy spells are not to be confused with "awakening". If a spiritual episode occurs who knows the lasting effect?

Austin punctuates the marriage of Zen with the brain with question of reformation - changing the heart, or mind. He asks, "is the transformed brain emotionless?" He answers, "No. It is stable, balanced, no longer overcome by the ups and downs of the emotions." He responds to one perplexing thought the reader may have with, "(M)any people grow, by degrees, as the result of practicing introspection into the troublesome events of their daily lives, ...not (just) limited to the pilgrims who are on the meditative way." This is clearly not confined to events resulting from patient-psychologist relationships. (pp. 642)

Austin proposes early in the text that from historical readings there appears to be an ever-evolving message: "in the final analysis, Zen training means brain training." His personal experiences in both his work as a medical doctor and Zen student would captivate the most casual reader.

*Thich An-Hue*

## What in Brief is Buddhism?

By Ananda W. P. Guruge  
Mitram Books, Monterey Park, CA

The extremely rapid development of interest by both those from the curiosity forum and from the great number of practitioners of Buddhism has stimulated the need for writings, which explain this religions in easily understood rhetoric of the system as it has grown in Eastern countries and in the West. This book is situated at an intersection of philosophy and practice in that the description of methods of Buddhist devotion are traceable to pedagogic discipline, to historical facts and descriptions of ethical and systematic practices.

The author asks himself the question, "What in Brief is Buddhism?" in a way to stimulate on-going interest for the reader. Not that the reader, from casual acquaintance seeker to the scholar, viewing an in-depth flow of the Buddha-Dharma, needs a catalyst to continue the volume from cover to cover; Guruge's display of his profound knowledge and of chronology events holds the interest of all.

From the beginning there is the reference to Buddhism as having the components of a "religion" but with the flexibility of supporting free-thinkers and without an oppressive dogma influenced by one superior being to whom all followers owe obeisance. The Buddha-Dharma is ... "tolerant enough to allow every form of spiritual and supernatural experience to survive under its benign protection." Through 25 centuries Buddhism has met the challenges of diverse religious systems, science and other forces of modernization.

According to the author, Dean of Academic Affairs and Director of the International Academy of Buddhism at Hsi Lai University, Rosemead, California, Buddhism's attracting thousands of devotees early in its rise as a religion is due to the Buddha himself teaching and preaching the message of suffering through his personal experience. He adopted the language of the people and not that of scholars and priests; he encouraged all to work for "deliverance", an objective achievable by each one alone; he

preached doctrines which had a scientific basis, far ahead of their time; he placed himself in un-safe situations to exemplify a teaching conundrum; he founded a devoted sangha of monks and nuns with democratic rules to afford allegiance and living as a vehicle to carry on his teachings after his death and attainment of parinibbana.

The author follows the flow of development of Buddha Dharma from India through South and South-east Asia, Central and East Asia, Tibet, Korea and Japan. He stresses the importance in the thrust of Buddhist religion to its leadership role in creating an attitude of tolerance with all other religions. Within its own boundaries are centuries of seeking unity among its diverse traditions.

This book is appropriately in with the merging of the Buddhist religion with inter-faith, especially in the advent of Humanistic Buddhism. How else can such a brief scholarly text bring the crux of the Buddha's teachings to a vast audience? The author, in a well-organized simple presentation and lucid writing style, has done just that.

*Thick An-Hue*

## Free at Last in Paradise

By Ananda W. P. Guruge

Published by [www.1stbooks.com](http://www.1stbooks.com) and by  
[www.buybooksontheweb.com](http://www.buybooksontheweb.com)

*Free at Last in Paradise* is a fictitious autobiography of Tiny Banda (T.B.) Valour Lion, a remarkable person. He is a real hero - - unselfish, self-sacrificing, devoted to raising a new generation of leaders from the downtrodden outcasts. The scenario is Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, a place which became the cradle of Buddhism after its expulsion from its Indian birthplace and an island conquered, subdued, and exploited by Portuguese and Dutch overlords, suffering from centuries, dormant but not dead.

In 1796, the British took over and entrusted the national education system to the Anglican Church and other Christian missionaries. Missionaries attracted the

villagers to their schools, while Buddhist community schools were closed. A few exceptional British teachers realized the unfairness of the British policy, however, and objected to forceful conversions. To quote one enlightened head of a British school, Rev. Kenneth Saunders: "What do they (the church authorities in England) want me to do? To placate my colleagues the Christian missionaries... to alienate the up and coming generation from [their] national culture and heritage. This cannot be any worse crime than lowering the self-esteem of the young in any nation. When I point this out, they question my patriotism....What they want me to do is to ensure that generation after generation of this country become docile, submissive subjects of the Great Empire."

Buddhist monks challenged the Christians to defend their faith in public controversies. With their limited resources, the Buddhists tried to assert their spiritual and cultural identity. But they needed inspiration from a foreign leader with experience in liberation from overlords. Against this background emerged a couple: an American Colonel and his collaborator, Henry Steel Olcott and the Russian-born Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. He had participated in the Civil War in America and together they founded the Theosophical Society. Spreading their ideas, they arrived in Asia where they established branches of the Society in India, their aim being bridging over doctrinal differences, internecine conflicts, uniting them for common welfare.

Olcott and Blavatsky arrived in Ceylon in 1880. During their first trip of six weeks, they galvanized the populace in public meetings for national and religious revival. They established branches of the theosophical society for the lay people and involved them in issues of Buddhism, which used to be the exclusive prerogative of the monks. They opened schools to teach secular skills and technology with the purpose of enabling them to govern their own country instead of being exploited and drained by the occupants, and to use the national income for developing public infrastructure. Olcott kept coming back to check on their progress. He worked with, sometimes against, his best allies, the Buddhist monks led by Sumangala.