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## Ven Dr. M. Punnaji Maha Thera



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Ven. Maha Thera Punnaji is a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka, of the Theravada tradition. He is a disciple of His Holiness the Madihe Pannasiha, the late Mahanayaka Thera of Vajirarama, Head of the Mihiripanne Dhammarakkhita Amarapura Nikaya. Ven. Punnaji was ordained at the Bhikkhu Training Centre, Maharagama, in his thirties. He obtained his training in meditation at the Island Hermitage, Dodanduwa. He studied modern science and Western medicine in Sri Lanka, and he obtained two doctorates while in the United States, one in Western psychology, and another in Western philosophy and comparative religion. Ven. Punnaji has made an in-depth research into the original teachings of the Buddha, which he thinks is different from all the modern schools of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana, including Zen and Pure-land Buddhism. This research was not only academic but also experiential. He also did research into the form of Buddhist Psychotherapy, which he thinks is the best way to introduce Buddhism to the modern

world. As Buddhism, in its original form, was not a mere religion of faith and worship, but a psychological technique of growth and evolution of the human consciousness.

Ven. Punnaji presents Buddhism as a growth technique that transforms an individual's disposition by changing a person's sense of values and goal in life, while it also overcomes the stress and strain of modern living. He points out that the teaching of the Buddha is about a conscious return to the original equilibrium, which the normal person loses in childhood, due to unconscious emotional impulses. This return to the original equilibrium, called NIBBANA, is achieved through a psychological technique of conscious evolution of the human consciousness, where the human being goes through a paradigm shift, and thereby transcends all human weaknesses, and enters a superhuman "divine" state, which all religions worship as "God." This means that Buddhism is a humanistic philosophy that recognizes the unity in all religions and defines "religion", "God" and "divinity" from a humanistic point of view. This also means that the Buddha has brought a saving message of hope to the world, by introducing a very optimistic philosophy that guarantees a freedom from all human weakness and suffering, by means of a conscious human psychological technique of growth and evolution of the human mind, which brings results here and now.

Ven. Punnaji has many students in the United States, Canada and Europe who had benefited from his teachings, and who express their appreciation by speaking about the immense change in their lives for the better.