



Buddhism and its principles for the purification of mankind

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Abstract

Buddhism is not simply a religion but a philosophy encompassing a variety of traditions, beliefs and practices which are based mainly on teachings attributed to Siddhartha Gautama, worldly known as the Buddha ("awakened one" or "enlightened one" in Pali).¹ Buddhism is a practice of constantly refining our lifestyle in the light of the relationship that tends to define us. If we grow attached to a concept of what these relationship ought to be and inside on the primacy of our perspective, it is the duty of the consummate practitioner to kill-off those parts of us that support that false manner of thinking/being.² Dr. B.R. Ambedkar highly influenced by Buddha and was convinced that the novelty of teachings, leadership qualities, scientific temper, logical arguments make "Religion of the Buddha", the ideal religion for the "modern man who knows science." He was convinced that "Buddhism was the only religion" which could save society "awakened by science" and "without which the society would perish."³ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar capable of alleviating the status of the low caste people viewed Buddhism as a religion. He said, "I prefer Buddhism because it gives three principals in combination, which no other religion does. Buddhism teaches Prajna (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), Karuna (love), and Samata (equality). This is what man wants for a good and happy life. Neither God nor soul can save society."⁴ One of the most ardent supporters of these views has been our erstwhile President Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. Albert Einstein, in a foreword written in 1956 to the Government of India Publication. "2500 years of Buddhism" (ed. P.V. Bapat,⁵ he declares:

"The religion of the future will be cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and spiritual, it should be based on a religion sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual and a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description.....If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism."

Buddhism

The Nobel Prize winner was not only alone in his positive assessment of the Buddhism's potential for going beyond the boundaries of western thought. The British mathematician, philosopher Alfred North Whitehead declared, "Buddhism is the most colossal example in the history of applied metaphysics." His contemporary, Bertrand Russell, another Nobel Prize laureate, found in Buddhism the greatest religion in history, because "it has had the smallest element of persecution." But beyond the freedom of inquiry he attributed to the Buddha's teaching, Russell discovered a superior scientific method- one that reconciled the speculative and the rational while investigating the ultimate questions of life:

"Buddhism is a combination of both speculative and scientific philosophy. It advocates the scientific method and pursues that to a finality that may be called Rationalistic. In it are to be found answers to such questions of interest as: 'What is mind and matter? Of them, which is of greater importance? Is the universe moving towards a goal? What is man's position? Is there living that is noble?' it takes up where science cannot lead because of the limitations of the latter's instruments. Its conquests are those of the mind."⁶

Buddhism does not include the idea of worshipping a creator god, some people do not see it as a religion in the normal, Western sense. The basic tenets of Buddhist teaching are straightforward and practical:



nothing is fixed or permanent; actions have consequences; change is possible. So Buddhism addresses itself to all people irrespective of race, nationality, caste, sexuality, or gender. It teaches practical methods which enable people to realize and use its teachings in order to transform their experience, to be fully responsible for their lives.⁷

The ultimate aim is not to merge a higher power, but to purify one's own until it is perfect, at which point one realize total freedom from suffering; that freedom is the supra-mundane happiness called "Nibbana." Buddhism is in essence a practice, a technique by which one cultivates morality, concentration and wisdom.⁸ Buddhism not a teachings to change others; it is a teaching to change ourselves. This change occurs when we are "filled with" or awaken to the Dhamma, and can deeply and positively transform the way we view our life and all life around us. Ultimately, as the life of the Buddha himself demonstrated, we find that the true gift of Buddhism is really compassion. Awakening to the Dhamma – and the corresponding awakening of compassion – leads to the discovery of wonderful and dynamic life full of energy and creativity.⁹ Buddhism teaches that in an interconnected world, all actions have consequences (Karma). The consequences of acts undertaken in this and earlier lifetimes will be felt in a next one, in a process known as reincarnation. It is a Buddhist aim to educate oneself and meditates in order to escape from this cycle of rebirth, to enter Nirvana. There for essence of Buddhism is- "To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one's mind – this is the teachings of the Buddha."¹⁰

Buddhism is, although not strictly speaking, a religion, is a systematic exercise in spirituality, certainly one of the greatest ever conceived. It offers the individual a means by which he may fulfill himself through understanding, reaching eventually the plane of the supra-person on which both the self and self-knowledge are no longer

useful. Meister Eckhart, the great Christian mystic, said: "The kingdom of God is for none but the thoroughly dead." The Buddhist would agree, though he would probably prefer a less grim way of saying it. Nirvana in life, the peace that "passed all understanding," is the conquest of life, the discovery of the permanent in its flux of psychophysical accident and circumstances. The Buddhist believes that through meditation and good hard though he can follow the Buddha through the successive stages of enlightenment and achieve at last the perfect wisdom, which surmounts.¹¹

As the Marquess of Zetland, a former Viceroy of India, reveals : "it is indeed to the Buddhist books that we have to turn for an account of the manner in which the affairs of the early example of representative self governing institutions were conducted. And it may come as a surprise to many to learn that in the assemblies of Buddhists in India 2500 years and more ago are to be found the rudiments of our own parliamentary practice of the present day. The dignity of the assembly was preserved by the appointment of a special officer- the embryo of Mr. Speaker in our house of commons. A second officer was appointed to see that when necessary a quorum was secured-the prototype of the Parliamentary Chief Whip in our own system. A member initiating business did so in the form of a motion, which was then open to discussion. In some cases, this was done once only, in others three times, thus anticipating the practice of Parliament in requiring that a bill be read a third time before it become law. If discussion disclosed a difference of opinion the matter was decided upon by the vote of the majority, the voting being by ballot."¹²

Thus we could say that the Buddha's Dhamma is, as experience and as a way to practice realization, a religion; as the intellectual formation of this experience, a philosophy; and as a result of self-observation and analysis, a psychology.

Tenets of Buddhism

The heart of the Buddha's teaching lies in



the Four Noble Truths (Cattāri Ariyasaccāni) which he expounded in his very first sermon¹³ to his old colleagues, the five ascetics, at Isipatana (modern Sarnath) near Benares. In this sermon, as we have it in the original texts, these four Truths are given briefly.¹⁴ Easy to understand Buddha's four Noble trusts with this example.

One physician may gravely exaggerate an illness and give up hope altogether. Another may ignorantly declare that there is no illness and that no treatment is necessary, thus deceiving the patient with a false consolation. You may call the first one pessimistic and the second optimistic. Both are equally dangerous. But a third physician diagnoses the symptoms correctly, understands the cause and the nature of the illness, sees clearly that it can be cured, and courageously administers a course of treatment, thus saving his patient. The Buddha is like the last physician. He is the wise and scientific doctor for the ills of the world (*Bhaisajya-guru*).¹⁵ The four Noble Truths are:

a Dukkha

b Dukkha Samudaya, the arising or origin of *Dukkha*

c Dukkha Nirodha, the cessation of *Dukkha*,

d Dukkha Nirodha Magga, the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*

a. Dukkha:What is the Noble Truth of Suffering? Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering: in short the five categories affected by clinging are suffering. The First Noble Truth with its three aspects is: "There is suffering, *dukkha*. *Dukkha* should be understood. *Dukkha* has been understood." This is a very skillful teaching because it is expressed in a simple formula, which is easy to remember, and it also applies to everything that you can possibly experience or do or think concerning the past, the present or the future. The First Noble Truth is not a dismal metaphysical statement saying that everything is suffering. Notice that there is a difference between a

metaphysical doctrine in which you are making a statement about The Absolute and a Noble Truth, which is a reflection. A Noble Truth is a truth to reflect upon; it is not an absolute; it is not The Absolute. This is where Western people get very confused because they interpret this Noble Truth as a kind of metaphysical truth of Buddhism - but it was never meant to be that.

You can see that the First Noble Truth is not an absolute statement because of the Fourth Noble Truth, which is the way of non-suffering. You cannot have absolute suffering and then have a way out of it, can you? That doesn't make sense. Yet some people will pick up on the First Noble Truth and say that the Buddha taught that everything is suffering.

The Pali word, *dukkha*, means "incapable of satisfying" or "not able to bear or withstand anything": always changing, incapable of truly fulfilling us or making us happy. The sensual world is like that, a vibration in nature. It would, in fact, be terrible if we did find satisfaction in the sensory world because then we wouldn't search beyond it; we'd just be bound to it. However, as we awaken to this *dukkha*, we begin to find the way out so that we are no longer constantly trapped in sensory consciousness.¹⁶

"There is happiness in life,

Happiness in friendship,

Happiness of a family,

Happiness in a healthy body and mind,

But when one loses them, there is suffering".

*Dhammapada*¹⁷

b. Dukkha Samudaya:What is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering? It is craving, which renews being and is accompanied by relish and lust, relishing this and that: in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being. But whereon does this craving arise and flourish? Wherever there is what seems lovable and gratifying, thereon it arises and flourishes.

There is this Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, knowing and light that arose in me



about things not heard before. Abandoning the origin of suffering...must penetrate to this Noble Truth. This Noble Truth has been penetrated to by abandoning the origin of suffering: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, knowing and light that arose in me about things not heard before.

The Second Noble Truth with its three aspects is: 'There is the origin of suffering, which is attachment to desire. Desire should be let go of. Desire has been let go of.' The Second Noble Truth states that there is an origin of suffering and that the origin of suffering is attachment to the three kinds of desire: desire for sense pleasure (*kama tanha*), desire to become (*bhava tanha*) and desire to get rid of (*vibhava tanha*). This is the statement of the Second Noble Truth, the thesis, the *pariyatti*. This is what you contemplate: the origin of suffering is attachment to desire.¹⁸

c. Dukkha Nirodha: What is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering? It is the remainder less fading and cessation of that same craving; the rejecting, relinquishing, leaving and renouncing of it. But whereon is this craving abandoned and made to cease? Wherever there is what seems lovable and gratifying, thereon it is abandoned and made to cease. There is this Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, knowing and light that arose in me about things not heard before. This Noble Truth must be penetrated to by realizing the Cessation of Suffering...This Noble Truth has been penetrated to by realizing the Cessation of Suffering: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, knowing and light that arose in me about things not heard before.

The Third Noble Truth with its three aspects is: 'There is the cessation of suffering, of *dukkha*. The cessation of *dukkha* should be realised. The cessation of *dukkha* has been realised.' The whole aim of the Buddhist teaching is to develop the reflective mind in order to let go of delusions. The Four Noble Truths is a teaching about letting go by investigating or looking into - contemplating:

'Why is it like this? Why is it this way?' It is good to ponder over things like why monks shave their heads or why Buddha-rupas look the way they do. We contemplate...the mind is not forming an opinion about whether these are good, bad, useful or useless. The mind is actually opening and considering. 'What does this mean? What do the monks represent? Why do they carry alms bowls? Why can't they have money? Why can't they grow their own food? We contemplate how this way of living has sustained the tradition and allowed it to be handed down from its original founder, Gautama the Buddha, to the present time.

We reflect as we see suffering; as we see the nature of desire; as we recognize that attachment to desire is suffering. These insights can only come through reflection; they cannot come through belief. You cannot make yourself believe or realize an insight as a willful act; through really contemplating and pondering these truths, the insights come to you. They come only through the mind being open and receptive to the teaching - blind belief is certainly not advised or expected of anyone. Instead, the mind should be willing to be receptive, pondering and considering.

This mental state is very important - it is the way out of suffering. It is not the mind, which has fixed views and prejudices and thinks it knows it all or which just takes what other people say as being the truth. It is the mind that is open to these Four Noble Truths and can reflect upon something that we can see within our own mind.¹⁹

d. Dukkha Nirodha Magga: What is the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering? It is the Noble Eightfold Path, that is to say: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

The Fourth Noble Truth, like the first three, has three aspects. The first aspect is: 'There is the Eightfold Path, the atthangika magga - the way out of suffering.' It is also called the ariya magga, the Ariyan or Noble Path. The



second aspect is: 'This path should be developed.' The final insight into arahantship is: 'This path has been fully developed.'

The Eightfold Path is presented in a sequence: beginning with Right (or perfect) Understanding, *samma ditthi*, it goes to Right (or perfect) Intention or Aspiration, *samma sankappa*; these first two elements of the path are grouped together as Wisdom (*panna*). Moral commitment (*sila*) flows from *panna*; this covers Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood - also referred to as perfect speech, perfect action and perfect livelihood, *samma vaca*, *samma kammanta* and *samma ajiva*.

Then we have Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, *samma vayama*, *samma sati* and *samma samadhi*, which flow naturally from *sila*. These last three provide emotional balance. They are about the heart - the heart that is liberated from self-view and from selfishness. With Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, the heart is pure, free from taints and defilements. When the heart is pure, the mind is peaceful. Wisdom (*panna*), or Right Understanding and Right Aspiration, comes from a pure heart. This takes us back to where we started.

These, then, are the elements of the Eightfold Path, grouped in three sections:

1. Wisdom (*pañña*)

Right Understanding (*samma ditthi*), Right Aspiration (*samma sankappa*)

2. Morality (*sīla*)

Right Speech (*samma vacha*), Right Action (*samma kammanta*), Right Livelihood (*samma ajiva*)

3. Concentration (*samadhi*)

Right Effort (*samma vayama*), Right Mindfulness (*samma sati*), Right Concentration (*samma samadhi*)

The fact that we list them in order does not mean that they happen in a linear way, in sequence - they arise together. We may talk about the Eightfold Path and say 'First you have Right Understanding, then you have Right Aspiration, then....' But actually,

presented in this way, it simply teaches us to reflect upon the importance of taking responsibility for what we say and do in our lives.²⁰

1. Wisdom (*pañña*)

(a) Right Understanding

Right view is placed first because right view is the eye that guides and directs all the other factors. In the practice of the path, we need the vision and understanding supplied by right views, in order to see the way to travel along the path. Then we need the other factors, conduct or practice, in order to bring us to our destination.

Right view is placed at the beginning of the path to show that before we can set foot on the actual practice, we need the understanding provided by right view, as our guide, our inner director, to show us where we are starting from, where we are heading, and what are the successive stages to be passed through in practice. Usually the Buddha defines right view as the understanding of the Four Noble Truths: suffering, the origin, its cessation and the way to its cessation. To follow the path right from the start we need a correct perspective on the human condition. We have to see that our lives are not fully satisfactory, that life is impermanent, that it is subject to suffering, and we have to understand that suffering is something that we have to penetrate by means of knowledge, something that we have to conquer, and not something we should escape from by pain removers, entertainment, distractions or dull forgetfulness.

The Buddha defines right view as the understanding of the Four Noble Truths for a very important reason, namely, that he does not want his disciples to practice his teaching merely out of feelings of devotion. Rather, he wants them to follow the path on the basis of their own understanding. Their own insight into the nature of human life.²¹

(b) Right Intention (*Samma Sankappa*)

The second factor of the path is right intention. "Sankappa" means purpose, intention, resolve, aspiration, motivation.



This factor of right intention follows as the natural consequence of right view. Through right view, we gain an understanding of the real nature of existence, and this understanding changes our motivation, our purposes in life, our intentions and inclinations. As a result, our minds become shaped by right intentions as opposed to wrong intentions.

In his analysis of this factor, the Buddha explains that there are three kinds of right intentions:

- a) The intention of renunciation
- b) The intention of non-aversion or loving kindness.
- c) The intention of non-injury or compassion.

These are opposed to the three wrong intentions, the intention of sensuality, the intention of aversion and intention of harmfulness or cruelty. Right intention, as we said, follows naturally from right view. Whenever we gain right view, insight into the fact of Dukkha, then we become motivated to renounce our attachments, our clinging to pleasure, wealth, power and fame. We don't have to suppress the desire for them. The desire falls off naturally by itself. When we look at other beings through the lens of the Four Noble Truths, we see that others are also caught up in the net of suffering. This perception brings about a deep identification with others, a feeling of oneness with them, which leads to loving kindness and compassion. As these attitudes arise they motivate us to renounce aversion and hatred and all violence and cruelty.

This second factor counteracts the two unwholesome roots of actions, greed and aversion. With the next three factors, we learn to translate right intention into action. These we get the three factors of right speech, right action, and right livelihood.²²

2. Morality (sīla)

(c) Right Speech (Samma Vacha)

This contains four aspects.

- (1) Abstinence from false speech, that is, from lying - instead making an effort to speak truthfully.
- (2) Abstinence from slanderous speech,

statements intended to divide or create enmity between people. Instead the follower of the path should always speak words, which promote friendship and harmony between people.

(3) Abstinence from harsh speech, from speech, which is angry and bitter, which cuts into the hearts of others. Instead one's speech should always be soft, gentle and affectionate.

(4) Abstinence from idle chatter, from gossip. Instead one should speak words, which are meaningful, significant and purposeful.

The above show the tremendous power locked up in the faculty of speech. The tongue may be a very small organ compared to the body. But this little organ can do immense good or immense harm depending on how it is used. Of course, what we really have to master is not the tongue but the mind, which makes use of the tongue.²³

(d) Right Action (Samma Kammanta)

This factor is concerned with bodily action and has three aspects.

(a) Abstinence from destruction of life, that is, abstaining from killing of other living beings, which includes animals and all other sentient beings, to abstain from hunting, fishing etc.

(b) Abstinence from taking what is not given, that is, from stealing, cheating, exploiting others, gaining wealth by dishonest and illegal ways etc.

(c) Abstinence from sexual misconduct, that is from illicit types of sexual relations such as adultery, seduction, rape, etc. and for those who are ordained as monks, the observance of celibacy.

Although the principles of right speech and right action are worded negatively, in terms of a little reflection it shows that positive psychological factors of great power go along with abstinence.²⁴

(e) Right Livelihood (Samma Ajiva)

The Buddha teaches his disciples to avoid any occupation or job that causes harm and suffering to other living beings or any kind of work that leads to one's own inner



deterioration. Instead the disciple should earn a living in an honest, harmless and peaceful way.

Buddha mentions five specific occupations that one should avoid:

- (a) Dealing in flesh, ex. As a butcher.
- (b) Dealing in poisons.
- (c) Dealing in weapons and arms.
- (d) Dealing in slave trade and prostitution.
- (e) Dealing in intoxicants or liquors and drugs.

The Buddha also says that his followers should avoid deceitfulness, hypocrisy, high-pressure salesmanship, and trickery, or any kind of dishonest way of acquiring means of support.

These three factors which we have discussed-right speech, right action and right livelihood - deal with the outer conduct of life. The next three factors are concerned with the training of the mind.²⁵

3. Concentration (*samadhi*)

(f) Right Effort (*Samma Vayama*)

The Buddha begins the training of the mind with right effort. He places a special stress on this factor because the practice of the path requires work, energy and exertion. The Buddha is not a saviour: "The Enlightened Ones point out the path, you yourselves must make the effort". He says further, "the goal" is for the energetic person not for the lazy one. Here we come to the great optimism of Buddhism, the optimism which refutes all charges of pessimism. The Buddha says through right effort we can transform the whole structure of our lives. We are not the hopeless victims of our past conditioning. We are not the victims of our genes or of our environment, but through mental training it is possible to raise the mind to the high plateau of wisdom, enlightenment and liberation.²⁶

(g) Right Mindfulness (*Samma Sati*)

Living in right mindfulness is the bedrock of one's welfare and the foundation for one's mental development. It is a great blessing. It is one's greatest protection. Human beings generally have a certain level of mindfulness. However, it is somewhat

diffused. Therefore, it cannot be rightfully termed right mindfulness. Right mindfulness is not acquired so easily; but then, good things never come easy. To develop and acquire right mindfulness requires great effort and commitment. It requires sacrifice. Right mindfulness means keeping the mind in the present. This means that when one performs a certain task, one should be mindful and totally aware of that act at the time of performance. For example, when one brushes his/her teeth, he/she should be mindful of this process by paying attention to it and no fallow any other thoughts to intrude. When you are eating, eat in silence, mindful of eating. But, if you are engaged in conversation whilst eating, that would be wrong mindfulness. From those two simple examples, you canalize that living in right mindfulness is not such an easy task. If one performs two or three acts simultaneously, it is not a skill but a weakness. Doing one thing at a time is the real skill, the real achievement.²⁷

(h) Right Concentration (*Samma Samadhi*)

Right effort and right mindfulness are directed at the eighth factor of the path, right concentration. This is defined as wholesome one-pointedness of the mind, wholesome unification of the mind. To develop concentration we generally begin with a single object and attempt to fix the mind on this object so that it remains there without wavering. We use right effort to keep the mind focused on the object, right mindfulness to be aware of the hindrances to concentration, then we use effort to eliminate hindrances and strengthen the aids to concentration. With repeated practice the mind becomes gradually stilled and tranquil.²⁸

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