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Some Fundamental Values of Buddhism

By
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THE INSTITUTE OF BUDDHIST CULTURE

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SOME FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF BUDDHISM

**Vast
Literature** At the very threshold it must be understood that besides the doctrines associated with the very foundations of Buddhism, certain other fundamentals have also evolved during its long and eventful history, which merit attention.

To start with, let us have a glimpse of the vast Buddhist literature, which is a veritable expanse of multilingual intellectual ocean. Such is the immensity of this literature that even the barest sketch of it needs fill hundreds of large volumes : this is so, for by Buddhism, particularly in a comprehensive and all-inclusive sense, is to be understood not alone the Teachings of the Buddha and His immediately succeeding Elders (designated, the Theravada Teachings), which in themselves cover scores of volumes, but also the details of the historical developments that followed together with their cultural

implications, missionary achievements, civilising influences and enduring conquests of the human heart, in lands far and near and among diverse nations and races, during the last 2,500 years (designated, the Mahayana Doctrines). While the original Teachings are enshrined in the Pali Tipitaka (the three Baskets of Buddhist Teachings giving Regulations, Discourses and Philosophy), the later developments, philosophical, sectarian, historical, geographical and cultural, find detailed and robust treatment in languages such as the Sanskrit, the Sinhalese, the Chinese, the Tibetan, the Burmese, etc. In these, besides the translations and transliterations of the scriptures, there are thousands of commentaries and sub-commentaries and also numerous original indigenous works on the theory and practice of Buddhism. And, the modern contributions even are not meagre. Besides the recent Buddhist literature in several Eastern dialects, excellent works are available in the European languages such as the German, the French, the Russian, the English, etc.

Internationalism The staggering immensity of its literature is a feature unique to Buddhism. This may be accepted as one fundamental of its historical growth. The necessary corollary to this is the internationalism of Buddhism, benevolent undercurrents of which still pulsate life in a good part of Asia, Buddhist or otherwise, and also because of which conscious vital link exists among the Buddhists all over the world. This makes Buddhism an instrument of universal contact.

Missionary Spirit Traced back to its origin, the Internationalism of Buddhism leads us to the very source of this manifestation. That is the Missionary spirit of the Dhamma, which constitutes an essential part of the Sublime Teachings of the Great Master whose considered view was that Truth shone the better not by keeping to oneself but by liberally sharing with others. This gave to Buddhism a missionary mandate from its very inception and made it the earliest and the greatest missionary venture in world history : it was the noblest endea-

your known to human thought, for every Buddhist missionary was an ambassador of benign culture and an embodiment of human service, verily a Dhammaduta, i.e. a Messenger of Truth.

Closely associated with the Missionary spirit of Buddhism are its lucid Rationalism, unifying cultural influences, spirit of Fellowship, free Goodwill, splendid tolerance and above all its power of adaptability to local needs. This enabled Buddhism to mould itself with dignity to the needs of different nations in different climes and yet without the surrender of vital principles. The essential spirit of this laudable social service is admirably expressed in the Bodhisatta Ideal, which makes an individual defer even personal salvation for selfless service to humanity.

**Path to
Peace** These are a few of the several
broadbased fundamentals of the
historical results of Buddhism.

To these could be added many more, of which one particularly attracts immediate attention. That is the spotless purity of Buddhist shrines from even one stain of any blood, human or

animal, during the last 25 centuries. This eloquently testifies the Dhamma as a Path to Peace through non-violence. The cult of the sword or the bomb, so much in fashion today, is foreign to the very spirit of the Dhamma.

**The Triple
Gem**

Having noted a few fundamentals emanating from the historical role of Buddhism, let us now narrow down our vision and focus our attention on the very source of these marvellous developments. The Glorious Source is the Triple Gem (Tiratana), the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, the Teacher, His Teachings and the Taught, the fundamentals of which obviously merit a clear understanding, if one desired to understand the very heart of Buddhism.

The Buddha The personality of the Buddha is the essential secret of His success. It is a matter of history that the Sakyan Prince at the age of 29 renouncing the life of royal luxury and comfort put in heroic efforts for six years and attained to the

Highest Fruit of Self-Perfection, the Nibbana. He became the Buddha, the Enlightened One, the All Merciful, the Awakened One, and thereafter preached for full 45 years to the world yet asleep in darkness and ignorance: at the ripe age of 80 He passed on into that Final State which is beyond the meshwork of changeful phenomenon.

The life of the Lord, being the perfect embodiment of spotless character, courage, determination, heroic self-efforts, unbounded self-confidence, wisdom, universal goodwill and ever-readiness to serve the needy and the deserving, is the source of perennial inspiration for the acquisition of these virtues and also for the attainment of the Highest Goal.

Shocked by the cruel and irrational practices of His time, the Buddha worked hard for the rehabilitation of mercy, fellow-feeling, rational outlook and social justice. And, He succeeded well in this direction, so much so that He is acclaimed as the greatest moral teacher that ever preached on this globe.

That the Buddha opened the Road to Final Liberation through His own efforts, is

a standing stimulus to one and all. This exalted the dignity of human effort beyond human imaginings and infused courage and confidence in the heart of man to walk in His noble footsteps to reach the very Lofty Station which He himself had reached. What man once achieved, man can again, provided due effort is put in, quantitatively and qualitatively. This holds out to all the Banner of Hope and imparts to Buddhism the most optimistic tone.

**The Safe
Refuge**

The Buddha is no longer with us today, nor He can help us personally in any way. But, out of immense compassion, He has left for us a comprehensive Map of the journey to Nibbana with detailed directions for every step. This is His Dhamma. Not that alone : He has also left behind an Order of Disciples, the monks, who are expected to be the exemplary practitioners of His Doctrines. Thus through abstract precept and objective example, our imbibition of the spirit of the words of the Master is considerably facilitated and our journey to the Glorious Goal materially

hastened. That is why a Buddhist ever feels indebted to the Master and every now and then offers thanks to Him and comes under His Refuge as well as under the Refuge of his Teachings (the Dhamma) and their Practitioners (the Monks).

Let us now review some fundamentals of the Dhamma.

What is the Dhamma ? Is it

Is it a Religion? a religion ? If religion means ' soul of soul-less conditions, the opium of the masses ' which is a part of the definition by Karl Marx, Buddhism is no such religion. Nor Buddhism is a religion, if by religion is meant slavery to wishful concepts or gods. Yet, Buddhism is a religion in the sense of ethics and morals, which are used as specific remedies for well-defined definite problems and also as ' means ' to the highest ' ends '. It is also a religion in the sense of Effort and Hope. Certainly, Buddhism is ' the heart of a heartless world '—the expression used by Marx in the remaining part of his definition of religion.

Essentials Buddhism essentially is the Discovery of the Universal Problem of Suffering (Dukkha) : it is also the wonderful Discovery of the Effective solution of this problem. Thus Dhamma deals with the problem and its solution. This fundamental is the pivot point of Buddhism. It is from this hub, that the Four Noble Truths emerge, and it is round this very hub that the Noble 8-fold Path, the 3 attributes of existence, the Chain of Cause and Effect and the methods of self-control and personal culture revolve. For the understanding of Buddhism it is absolutely necessary to understand these indispensables.

The Buddha's approach to the world was that of a Perfect Scientist. Dogmas were thrown overboard, blind faith was immediately dethroned and superstitions discarded. Intellectual slavery was declared a curse and free and sincere thinking was encouraged. Thus blind surrender, even to a Buddha, is incompatible with the spirit of His Dhamma. ' Ever and ever, more and more noble endeavours ' is the watchword of a Buddhist.

It is on the living present that Buddhism lays emphasis, yesterdays being dead and tomorrows being yet unborn.

How did the Master Scientist, the Buddha deal with the world ?

He put the entire universe in His mental crucible, the psychological laboratory *par excellence*, and submitted it to a thorough analysis, material as well as mental. And, as a result, He discovered that the Samsara (the world) was an extremely complex phenomenon, with the attribute of incessant change spread out over and through it. This is Anicca (Impermanence), the truth of which is only recently understood by this atomic age of ours.

An incessant change signifies a perpetual move, a constant shift of relationship of things and ideas and the consequent existence of a perpetual friction. The objective manifestation of this is lack of permanency and the inevitable subjective reaction is dissatisfaction. Such a general uneasiness in

phenomenon is termed Dukkha, commonly rendered by 'Suffering' or 'Ill'.

And the unmistakable existence of Flux and Suffering inevitably spells absence of a changeless entity in phenomenon. That is Anatta (lit. Non-Self).

An understanding of these three fundamental characteristics of phenomena namely Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta, enlightens our vision and we begin to see the real nature of the world. This great discovery the Buddha applied to the personal world of man and the conclusions He arrived at, revolutionised human outlook. This brings us to the Four Noble Truths.

**The Truths
of Life** Man being a part of the universe,
he shares its three fundamental
attributes, Anicca, Dukkha and
Anatta. Dukkha in him manifests as pain,
sorrow, grief, lamentation, despair, frustration,
etc. There is Dukkha of body and mind,
in fact of the very fact of existence. If one
cannot get to or if one gets to but cannot
indefinitely stick to what one desires or if

one gets to and gets stuck to what one does not desire, one gets Dukkha. So much bound is life to Change that neither beauty of form or vigour of body, nor status or power, nor wealth or relations, nor friends or station, remain constant. Change for the apparent better or for the real worse, is all the same a change, the ultimate taste of which is Dukkha. That is why the Buddha declared it the Fact of Life. This is His First Noble Truth, the Truth of Universal Suffering (Dukkha Sacca). The cause of this personal Dukkha is found not in the objective world but in the subjective Desires, the handmaids of which are the three fundamental evil tendencies of mind, namely Lobha, Dosa and Moha, greed, hate and delusion. This is the Second Truth, dealing with the Origin of Dukkha (Dukkha Samudaya Sacca). The Third Truth deals with the removal of Dukkha (Dukkha Nirodha Sacca). This declares that the removal of the cause (the desires) leads to the removal of the effect (the Dukkha). This means : 'no desires :--no Dukkha'. The Fourth Truth is the practical prescription for the

removal of the cause. It is the Path (the Magga Sacca), the 8-stepped ladder mounting on which one diverges from Dukkha and ultimately reaches beyond its clutches.

Right views coupled with Right Resolve lead to Right Speech, Right Bodily Activities and Right Mode of Livelihood, which prepare for the sixth step, Right Effort. This is followed by Right Mindfulness and the final stage of Right Mental Concentration. This 8-fold Path is conveniently divided into Sīla, Samādhi and Paññā (Virtuous behaviour, Mental culture and Wisdom). With Wisdom dawns Vipassana, Insight into the real nature of things (Yathābhūta), which nears one to the Final Liberation, the Nibbana.

Nibbana Nibbana is the Final Release, release from the meshes of Sam-sara. It is a State of Poise, free from the reaches of Flux and thoroughly sterilised of Lobha, Dosa and Moha, the three cardinal evil concomitants of the human mind.

Scientific Outlook From what has been said, it must be obvious that Buddhism fundamentally is a scientific and

practical view of life. That scientific outlook is a fundamental aspect of Buddhism, will be obvious from the fact, that one of the definitions of Buddhism is 'Ehi passiko' which means 'come and see for yourself'. Such a challenging definition could only be born of robust self-confidence.

Buddhism takes into hand the fundamental problem of human sufferings and proceeds to eradicate these in a way, logical, practical and scientific. Viewed this wise, the Buddha indeed was a World-Physician. Just as a doctor confronts his patient, He faced the World-Dukkha. He saw that the patient was sick (Dukkha). He diagnosed the Cause (Cravings), He decided to remove the Cause and prescribed the Remedy (the Path). And whosoever uses the Prescription and follows the directions, can attain to the Cure. The negligence of the patient is no responsibility of the physician : the patient has to bear the consequences, which may be serious or mild depending on the nature and degree of the malady (i.e. the hold of Greed, Hate and

Delusion). Mere possession and worship of the prescription will not help anybody : it has to be ministered according to the instructions to be effective. One has to live up to the Ideal : mere possession or worship of it is not enough.

**Cause and
Effect**

The understanding of the Truths of Buddhism is greatly facilitated by an intelligent grasp of the Chain of Cause and Effect (Paṭiccasamuppāda), which enunciates that all that is, is the result of causes. The Formula is a methodical explanation of personal happenings. It runs as follows :—

Because of Ignorance arise Kammic Volitions : because of Kammic Volitions there is consciousness : because of consciousness there is mind and body : because of mind and body arise six-fold senses : because of these senses there is contact : because of contact there is sensation : because of sensation arises craving : because of craving arises clinging : because of clinging arises becoming : because of becoming arises birth : because

of birth there is old age, grief, pain and death.

How the understanding of this Chain of Suffering leads to the release from it, is shown by a striking passage continuing that formula as follows : ' Because of this Suffering there arises Faith : faith leads to delight and successively to joy, calmness, happiness, concentration, real knowledge of things, detachment, passionlessness, deliverance, Nibbana'.

It is obvious that the mother of all sufferings is Ignorance : for the removal of sufferings and evil, is advocated the replacement of Ignorance by Wisdom, the final stage of which is Enlightenment (Bodhi), from which the Dhamma derives its name, Buddhism (Bodhi-Dhamma, the Enlightened Religion).

The Middle Path Another fundamental of Buddhism is its emphasis on the 8-fold Path as the Middle Path, because this Path advocates denunciation of the extremes, the two extremes of over-indulgence and asceticism. It advises a sober, balanced life, a healthy body capable of sustaining a healthy mind.

Human Personality Here mention may also be made of the fundamentals of human personality, which consists of the mental and physical components (Nāma-Rūpa), the mental component being further sub-divided into Vedanā (sensations), Saññā (perceptions), Sankhāra (inclinations and ideations) and Viññāṇa (Consciousness or Cognitions). It must be understood here that Buddhist acceptance of human personality is merely in an empirical sense : it is vehemently denied in the permanent sense. While not denying the continuity of the individual from moment to moment and from life to life, Buddhism strongly denies the perpetuation of identity. The connection is maintained through deeds and their fruits and not through the 'doer' who really does not exist. It must also be realised that while the changeful individuality is emphasised as the instrument of salvation and universal service, the reception to gross individualism is that of positive denunciation in Buddhism.

Fuel of Life The five sections of the personality are ever naturally changing

and the change is further amended by our volitions (conscious actions), which collectively constitute our Kamma. The factor of 'will' tagged to kamma makes us responsible for our actions and therefore one has to bear the corresponding consequences, good or bad, either in this life or later on when kamma-results at death pass over to rebirth. Thus the rebirths go on, one after another, as long as the fires of Cravings go on burning with the fuel of Greed, Hate and Delusion. Only when through personal Sādhana (i.e. mental culture and noble deeds) the Cravings cease and the kamma-account is ciphered, the individual reaches the haven of Peace, the Nibbana. For one who aspires to be a Buddha, the task is harder still: he has to pass through a strenuous process of conditioning to a set of Ten Perfections (Paramitas).

Voluntary Vows To the hyper-busy worldly people it may seem that the Dhamma of the Buddha is a very complicated affair. Certainly it is because it is the appropriate treatment of the com-

plicated disease, the Samsara. But, the Buddha in His Infinite Compassion has simplified matters for the lay devotees, who engrossed with numerous domestic and extra-domestic responsibilities and burdens, seem to have hardly any time to devote to their present promotion and future weal. For them He prescribes the Five Precepts (Pañca-sīla) to begin with. These are voluntary vows taken by lay devotees, for abstinence from killing, stealing, misconduct in speech and sex relationship and also for abstinence from intoxicants. Practice of this code leads to self-control and benefits to society and in due course prepares one for higher discipline. The Buddha has also given to the lay followers a comprehensive advice for domestic amity and worldly progress.

This brings home to us another fundamental of Buddhism, i.e. its applicability to the lay followers as well as to the monks.

Free Will The Dhamma is a vast ocean of purifying fluid. Any and every one is entitled to have a sip from it or a dip

in it, and the sip will satiate or the dip will wash to the extent one knows the use of the precious waters. There is equality of opportunity for all : this ensures social justice and is also a stimulus to everybody for personal promotion. But, the extent to which the opportunity is availed of, is left to personal Free Will, there being no compulsion in Buddhism. Everyone is left free to make or mar his progress, and because everyone is self-responsive, everyone is self-responsible.

**Coefficient
of Virtue** A person may be a Buddhist by birth, or through devotion or conviction or practice, but these merely label him as connected with Buddhism : the real coefficient of Buddhism in him, however, is settled by the degree to which the Dhamma is integrated into his psychology and the extent to which it is equated in his life. The label matters less, the Kamma contents of a man assess his real worth.

Vast Field The Ocean of the Dhamma, as already said, is vast. One is free

to establish his or her contact with it at any point. There is a vast field for choice for everyone and one may choose what suits personal temperament best. Thus in the field of meditation alone, there are 40 groups of objects of meditation. It may suit one to meditate on a dead putrifying body to understand Anicca, yet it may suit another to contemplate on the beauty and serenity of the face of the Buddha image : and it may suit some others to contemplate on the Sublime States (Brahmavihāra), namely Love, Compassion, Joy and Poise through non-attachment (Mettā, Karunā, Muditā and Upekkhā). Contact may also be established through the understanding of Anicca, Dukkha • or Anatta, or even through mere Sīla, or through the simplest avenue of Dāna (Charity).

**Law of
Progress**

Once the contact with the Dhamma is established, the progress must be not only maintained but also enhanced : for, in Samsara, there being nothing that is static, if one does not move forward, one can be rest assured that

one is moving backward. And, the orbit of the movement is only limited by the infinite horizon of the Samsara, which has world-systems upon world-systems in its fold, not limited to the region of man alone but extended to the planes of celestial beings and gods above and animals, ghosts and hells below. If in this vast space, one is not rising, one is falling : certainly one cannot be stationary. The only exception to this is the case of an Ariya (the Saint), who has reached a stage wherefrom fall is foreign and progress the rule. One who has entered the first stage of this blessed phase is a Sotapanna (i.e. an entrant into the stream to Nibbana) ; this stage is attained by overcoming the first 3 of the 10 fetters (Sanyojana) of the Sansara : in the next stage the next 2 fetters are weakened (Sakadagami) and in the 3rd these are overcome (Anagami). When all the fetters are broken through self-culture, one attains to the Highest, the self-conquest (Arahat), the worth of which is greater than even the conquest of the whole world. A fundamental characteristic of Buddhism is, that while it

explains the philosophy of the 'fall', it allies only with the feature of the 'rise' and incessantly stimulates the latter till the progress reaches its Final Goal.

**Need for
Vigilance**

The science of personal progress reveals to us the feature of the Kamma-fundamental. A person may own palaces, may be sitting on a throne, may wield tremendous influence and power or may have his purse overbrimming with wealth. But, all these things merely constitute his environs conditioned by a section of his kamma-results. When the fruit thereof is exhausted he may fall to a state worse than a beggar or more loathsome than a worm in the sewage, depending on the fructification of some other segment of his kamma-result reserves. It is because of this, that at times we find a Prime Minister dying on the gallows in his own country as a proven criminal or a great dictator sprayed with bullets by his own people or a sovereign's descendants begging shelter and food : on the other hand a social back-bencher may suddenly be found

elevated to high position and a beggar may unexpectedly find himself full of wealth. Thus, a person is not what he seems or appears to possess. His total kamma-results are his real possessions ; he is heir only to the remnant results of his deeds. This understanding stimulates a Buddhist towards noble endeavours : this also makes him ever persevering for good deeds and ever vigilant lest the evil creeps in unawares.

**The Greatest
Religion**

There are many more fundamentals and fundamental values of Buddhism. But, what has already been said will suffice to show that the Teachings of the Buddha are marvellous. They begin with Understanding, pass through Virtue and end in Salvation. Their simplicity coupled with profundity, their theory combined with practice, their efficacy and universal applicability to all ages and times and climes and their healthy co-ordination of the realistic and the idealistic aspects of life, coupled with their appeal of reason, universal Love and sympathy and

their emphasis on social justice and human service and above all their ultimate object to annihilate Ignorance and liquidate self, make Buddhism the beacon-light of human philosophies. No wonder this unique religion, without fanaticism, persecution and coercion, became the world's greatest religion.

**World's
Need**

And, finally, simply stated Buddhism means: to cease from evil, to do good and to purify the heart. This is what the world needs today to get out of its chaos, to step out of its mire.

Future Role

Buddhism is the greatest of the world religions and, if democracy has a meaning, Buddhism has a privilege and a responsibility for the contemporary world. H. G. WELLS, the great world historian in connection with Buddhism says :—

‘ Over great areas of the world it still survives : it is possible that in contact with western science, and inspired by the spirit of history, the original teaching of

Gautama, revived and purified, may play a large part in the direction of human destiny '.

This is a fundamental, *par excellence*, concerning the future role of Buddhism.

MAY THE DHAMMA LIVE FOR EVER

DHAMMA VIJAYA

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