

*****WHAT IS BUDDHISM?*****

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What is Buddhism, is it a philosophy a religion or an ethical system? Strictly speaking it is not a philosophy, for it does not contain an elaborate system of theories and facts exclusively for cognition, although it must be admitted that the Buddha has anticipated much modern speculation.

What is known as Buddhism consists of three aspects, the Doctrinal (pariyatti), the Practical (pattipatti), and the Realisable (pativedha) which are interdependent and interrelated. This doctrine is preserved in the Tripitaka. This Tripitaka, which contains the word of the Buddha, is estimated to be about eleven times the size of the Christian Bible. As the word itself implies, the Tripitaka consists of three baskets, namely: the Basket of Discipline (Vinaya Pitaka), the Basket of Discourses (Sutta Pitaka) and the Basket of Ultimate Things (Abhidamma Pitaka).

The Vinaya Pitaka, which is sub-divided into five books. deals with the rules and regulations of the Order of monks and nuns and gives a detailed account of the life and ministry of the Buddha. The Sutta Pitaka consists of discourses preached by the Buddha, and also in some instances, by his foremost disciples such as the Venerable Sariputta, Moggallana and Ananda. Divided into twenty-six books it is rather like a collection of prescriptions, for the discourses were propounded to suit the occasion and the temperament of different individuals. The Abhidamma Pitaka, however, is the most important and the most interesting because it elaborates the four ultimate things i.e., consciousness (citta), mental properties mental concomitants, (cetasika), matter or material qualities (rupa) and Nibbana.

So we see that Buddhism is concerned with truth and facts, and has nothing to do with theories and philosophies which may be accepted as gospel truth today and be thrown overboard tomorrow. The Buddha presented us with no new astounding philosophical theories, nor did he venture to create any new material science, rather he explain what is within and without so far as it concerns our emancipation, and ultimately he laid out a path of deliverance that is unique.

Is it then a religion? Neither is it a religion in the sense in which the word is commonly understood, for it is not a system of faith or worship. Buddhism does not demand blind faith from its adherents; mere belief is dethroned and replaced by confidence, Saddha, as it is known in Pali, based on knowledge of truth. The confidence placed by a follower in the Buddha is like a sick man towards the physician, or that of a student towards his teacher. A Buddhist seeks refuge in the Buddha because it is he who discovered the path of deliverance. A sick man should use the remedy the pupil should study what his teacher says in order to become learned. In just the same way, a Buddhist

who possesses saddha follows the Buddha's instructions in order to gain deliverance.

Is Buddhism then, an ethical system? It no doubt contains an excellent code of morals that is adaptable to all climes and ages, but it is much more than ordinary morality. The Singala Sutta (Sigalovada Sutta), Mangala Sutta, Metta Sutta, Vasala Sutta, Dhammika Sutta etc., should be read carefully to understand the high standard of morality; but morality, or sila, is only the A.B.C. of Buddhism.

Buddhism, therefore is neither a philosophy nor a religion, nor an ordinary ethical code, it is the doctrine of actuality, a means of deliverance; or, as it is called in Pali, the Dhamma.

The right-minded person concerns him or herself with the act, and not with the consequences; he considers not what is pleasant or unpleasant, but what is good and right according to the rules of morality. When he does right, and does not seek any result, he is relieved of all the burden of doubt, fear and perplexity, he never becomes involved in the inextricable tangle of difficulty. His mind is at peace, his conscience is serene; these are the requisites for health, happiness and long life.

There are two kinds of emotions. negative or destructive, and positive and constructive. Take as an illustration two persons who meet financial disaster. One reacts emotionally and falls into a stormy sea of bitterness, loses all hope and sinks in health, vigour and resolution, or he kills himself to end it all. The other man, who has learnt to think over the problems of life, to meditate, to rationalise applies every available method to overcome the problem and finds a satisfactory solution, for he has exercised his mind just as the athlete exercises his muscles. He is the master, while the other is a slave. Many disappointments and breakdowns would not exist if people were to live according to the Dhamma.

So you see, Buddhism is a philosophy of hope and certainty of achievement. It is the gospel of attainment of deliverance from unhappiness and suffering. The Buddha explained that in every mortal, however humble or lowly he may be, there is a grain of worth, a little of goodness, a spark of wisdom that can be kindled into a flame, which can be developed by conscious human effort. The Buddha encouraged everyone to strive for spiritual development, declaring that every right effort is sure of a reward here and now, in this life, or in a future one.

The Buddha also proclaimed that every low desire, every longing for ignoble things, every unworthy feeling that we conquer and every difficulty that we meet heroically and victoriously, which righteously according to the rules of morality, becomes another rung on the ladder by which we can climb to a nobler, higher life. This is the law of progressive development, the Buddhist doctrine of evolution, of attainment, of accomplishment

The Buddha drew for us the picture of progressive existence, a growth from small to great, from less to more,

from ignorance to knowledge, of development depending on inward strength, diligence put forth from life to life. This is the doctrine of human perfection won through altruism, discipline and wisdom.

The name of the founder of Buddhism was Gotama, this being the name of the clan or family to which he belonged. The word Buddha means 'awakened' or 'enlightened' one, and is not a name but a title of honour bestowed upon the sage Gotama. Gotama was born the son of an Indian king on what is now the boarder of modern Nepal six hundred and twenty-three years before Christ.

Dhamma, this law of righteousness, exists not only in a man's heart and mind, but it exist in the universe also; all the universe is an embodiment or revelation of Dhamma. The laws of nature and the mind of man. If a man lives by Dhamma, he will escape and come into Nibbana, the final release from suffering.

According to Buddhism the universe evolved, but it did not evolve out of nothingness, it evolved out of the dispersed matter of a previous universe; and when this universe is dissolved. its dispersed matter, or its residual energy which is continually renewing itself, will in time give rise to another universe in the same way. The process is therefore cyclic and continuous, and the universe itself is composed of millions of world systems, each with its various planes of existence.

That which we call 'man' is composed of mind and matter. According to Buddhism, apart from mind and matter (nama and rupa) which constitutes the so called man, there is no such thing as an immortal soul, (atta) which lies behind them. Matter (rupa) is the invisible qualities and forces, and there are altogether twenty-eighty types of material qualities which constitute the physical body of an animate being. Mind (nama) is the most important part of a being, and consists of the four mental aggregates, namely:

Feeling, of whatever kind (Vedana)
Perception, of sense objects,
or reaction to the senses (Sanna)
Mental Properties -fifty types of mental
formations including good and evil
tendencies and faculties (Sankhara)
Consciousness, which is the fundamental
factor of all the other three (Vinnana)

Buddhism teaches that with the practice of meditation and mind culture one can acquire the Insight Kowledges and thus attain Nibbana in this life itself. Through this enlightenment and wisdom, one can reach the end of this chains of rebirths.

Nibbana is not annihilation, neither is it kind of nothingness, it is state free from any possibility of the re-arising of the conditioned existence, the ultimate peace and happiness.

All the teachings of the Buddha can be summed up in one verse:

To refrain from all evil
To do what is good
To cultivate the mind
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

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