

REKINDLING THE LIGHT OF SADDHARMA

Humanity found a new trend of social and ethical living as history renewed with a brightest phase in the 580 BC, when lord Buddha started disseminating the light of "Saddharma". During his forty-five years of his ministry he showed the world a highly social and spiritual way of life, gave an answer to the riddle of life and death and taught the path out of this cyclic predicament to perfect enlightenment, thus giving birth to the world's greatest store-house of moral, spiritual and intellectual values - Buddhism.

His teachings, vast and profound and yet empirical and rational as they are, flourished for centuries notwithstanding the discrepancies among the newly sprung denominations. Promulgated and patronised by enlightened patriarchs and righteous monarchs, the spiritual legacy of the Lord remained intact both in the forms of doctrinal texts as well as meditational practice. Above all, the series of Sangha councils have done great benefit to this noble cause of upholding and propagating the precious Dharma. For ages, the light of Buddha's teachings pervaded throughout the entire Asian continent producing countless enlightened personalities and solacing the hearts of untold millions. This great nation was then concurrently at the zenith of her prosperity discerning the glorious golden age. One may as well reflect upon the Ashokan era to fully and veraciously appreciate this historical fact.

Unfortunately, this wholesome propagation, owing to both internal and external adversities received a major set-back from the beginning of this millenium until the last century when the light of Dharma once again began to shine in India. Distinguished and noble personalities like Angarika Dharmapala and Baba Saheb Ambedkar renovated the holy sites and reinforced the Buddhist culture and tradition thereby bringing about a substantial Buddhist renaissance. Through them, the priceless Buddhist heritage found a renewed expression in the land of its origin. Today the fulfilment of their sacred aspiration and the continuation of their venture, the very task of re-establishing and propagating the Buddha's teachings in India and the world over rests solely upon us.

Our strife-torn world today, hovering over the brink of <sup>moral</sup> annihilation and special catastrophe inflicted with unabated corruption needs Buddhism no less than two and half millenia ago. Buddhism is the most promising cure for the social diseases that plague our world and a religio-philosophy that is much appealing and acceptable to the people of our age. What makes Buddhism appealing and outstanding? The answers could be many but to mention a few, they are :

RATIONALISM. Buddha's teachings are rationally based upon valid reasoning and realisations and can withstand any analytical tests and examinations. Blind faith and dogmatism have no room in Buddhism and are shunned as misleading ways. The Buddhist propositions like impermanence, egolessness, dependent-origination,

2

Karmic law of cause and effect, voidness etc are all verified and established through profound analyses and at the same time realised after years of empirical practice. We can best illustrate the Buddhist rationality by Buddha's maxim, "Come and see", and the admonition,

"Ye! the monks and the wise  
Must analyse my words  
Like assaying gold by burning,  
cutting and polishing;  
Then accept but not simply by faith."

**EGALITARIANISM.** Buddha was the first Indian and perhaps the first man to openly challenge the social matrix of caste, class and race. His teachings went beyond all the social barriers. Buddha undermined and refuted the concept of measuring a person's merit by caste, colour, sex and race and instead emphasised on the moral and ethical qualities. He declared :

" Not by matted hair, neither by family  
Nor by birth does one become a Brahmin.  
It is that pure one with truth and Dharma  
Who is the Brahmin," and  
" He who does no evil through body,  
Speech and mind, him I call Brahmin."

This social outlook, an outlook that is uncompromisingly egalitarian attracted great followers like Baba Saheb Ambedkar and is still captivating the faith and loyalty of millions in the west.

**VOLITIONALISM.** Buddha declared all individuals independent and responsible for their own action and fate. He particularly stressed upon the inevitable law of cause and effect and vehemently objected the theistic view of an objective individual creator. We can clearly find Buddha's volitional ideals in the following verses :

" One is one's own master,  
One is one's own enemy.  
In doing what is good and evil,  
One is one's own witness."  
" I teach you the path to liberation,  
But liberation depends on you."  
" One is one's own master,  
None shall become one's master.  
Through disciplining oneself fully,  
The wise attain fortunate rebirth."

Buddha showed mankind the greatest and the purest freedom that mankind ever received in the whole history of existence.

**NON-VIOLENCE.** The restriction from inflicting pain upon others forms first and the foremost precept in Buddhist practice. It is from this superb quality, that Buddha is attributed the epithet - The teacher of non-violent peaceful path. Buddha starkly propounded non-violence and harmlessness in the following words :

" Scorn not those who scorn you,  
Abuse not those who abuse you,  
Revile not those who revile you,



Hurt not those who hurt you."  
 " Hatred cannot be overcome by hatred,  
 But by love alone, this is the ancient law."

**ALTRUISM.** Humanitarian principles like the Bodhicitta, an earnest aspiration to attain enlightenment for all mother sentient beings and the four immeasurables of love, compassion, joy and equanimity are exquisite teachings of lord Buddha. Benevolence in the form of the six "paramitas", is the part and parcel of a Bodhisattvic character. Shantideva, an eighth century Buddhist poet clearly puts, " This (Bodhicitta) is the intrinsic butter extracted by churning the milk of "Saddharma" ", and further argues,  
 " I must dispel others' sufferings  
 Because they are sufferings, like my own suffering.  
 I must benefit other beings,  
 Because they are sentient, like my own body."  
 In brief, altruism is the essence of Buddhism and no Buddhist doctrines and practice are short of altruistic attitude.

**PRIMACY OF MIND.** Among the two - mind and matter - Buddha emphasised on mind and mental phenomena. Pain and pleasure, life and liberation, all depends on the mind within rather than the material without. The first two sentences in Dhammapada states :  
 " Mind is the fore-runner of all things.  
 Mind is the chief and all things are mind made."  
 Acharya Chandrakirti, an expounder of the non-essentialist Madhyamika school argues, " The multiple external world and the internal sentient beings are all creations of the mind." Buddha placed top priority on mind because all things, good or bad, are manifestations of the mind. Besides Buddhism is enriched with unique types and techniques of meditation, an effective and skillful means of edification and spiritualisation.

**MULTIFOLD TEACHINGS.** Buddha taught a great range of teachings to match the varying mental inclinations and capacities of his followers. His teachings, however diverse they may seem, meet this end of transforming the naive ordinary mind and taking the practitioner nearer to Nirvana and enlightenment. Hence, it is said in Lankavatara Sutra :  
 " As long as the mental variations function,  
 So long shall the Vehicles (teachings)  
 prevail."  
 " Like the physician prescribes medicines  
 for the patients,  
 So, does Buddha teaches his disciples."

Likewise, we still find Saddharma as an unparalleled panacea for the mundane ills, an incessant inspiration of hope and a sole source of solace and peace. Today, we are at a crucial stage, at the threshold to a new era of revivalism and resurgence, when the light of Buddha's teachings shall once again abound. In our quest for the virtuous goal there are a few things I would like to propose.  
 Firstly, the Buddhist countries and communities need to give adequate liberal Dharmic training to our youth besides their



general education so that their technical knowledge coupled with Buddhist principles could be used wisely in the service of the society. Value-free education with over emphasis on purely intellectual attitude in the west have turned an alarming number of youth corrupt and sophisticated, hedonistic and infidelistic making them ruthless destroyers of civilization and an ethical society. Being aware of this, we must help the younger generations to grow up in such a spirit that the fundamental Buddhist principles should be to them as the air they breathe. Secondly, Buddhist schools and sects remain far aloof, ignorant of the unique traditions and practices that each so dearly treasures. Our diversity and distance sends the world thinking that the original teachings of the Buddha are lost forever. Therefore, to dispel this misconception and to learn from each other, there must be frequent share of ideas, rituals and traditions. Holy days credited to lord Buddha should be celebrated with conventions and conferences, seminars and retreat camps for us to come closer and live together as one Buddhist family in an atmosphere of love and harmony within the house of Buddha's compassion.

Thirdly, our planet is highly infested with communal tribulations and is in grave need of religious harmony. Thus, our approach towards other religions need to be improved and inter-religious ties need to be further strengthened. Buddhist participation and representation in the inter-religious movements and organisations has to be increased and both comparative and critical study of the world religions need to be undertaken. Let's have a broader outlook and learn to co-exist with other religions sharing the best that we have.

Fourthly, there has to be an indiscriminate premier Buddhist institute here in India where all monks, scholars and devotees, irrespective of sect, race and nation can assemble to study and master the Buddhist studies and meditations. We need this Nalanda of our age to confidently uphold the light of Buddha's teachings with unfailing illuminations.

Fifthly, the holy Buddhist sites have to be entirely taken care of by the Buddhist communities with renovations and restorations wherever necessary. Simultaneously, let's be vigilant and careful so that in the process of our claim to the places of historical importance, not to shed a single drop of blood. A momentary patience can better please Buddha and all the sages than any other material acquisition.

Let's with a common conviction, follow a righteous course and direction to realise our vision and actualise our dreams; our earnest wish to uphold the universal light of Saddharma, illustrious and blazing as a consolation for the nescient world plunged in the unfathomable ocean of self-created misery. Sweat has to be shed and tears must be wiped; despite the dauntless hope and will there is a long way to go.

Firstly, the Buddhist countries and communities need to give adequate liberal financial training to our youth besides their