

## **BUDDHISM OCCUPIES A UNIQUE POSITION**

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Among all the religions of the world, Buddhism occupies a unique position in respect of the humanity of its preacher, novelty of its principle and universality of its applicability. Unlike other teachers of mankind, the Buddha is essentially a man in flesh and blood. He lived, moved and had his being among his fellow beings, most sympathetically sharing their wheals and woes alike. Born of royal parents in a Khattiya family; luxury and grandeur, wealth and power, the beautiful wife, and the newly born babe could not attract him to the worldly life. Thoroughly versed in the traditional lores and a master of the three Vedas and all the then known arts and sciences though he was, they failed to give him lasting satisfaction.

Deeply moved by the utter helplessness of men and other beings on earth who are subject to innumerable miseries throughout their existence from which they had no escape he renounced the world and set out in search of truth that he might bring about the end of suffering.

With his unquenchable thirst for knowledge he went from teacher to teacher who were famous for their learning and erudition, but they too failed to satisfy him. Disgusted at the emptiness of human knowledge he decided to seek it himself through asceticism. But six years of asceticism proved futile. He came to realise that a life of austerity and self-mortification is as much useless as the one of luxury and pomp in the quest of truth. He then took recourse to a moderate life, begging alms, taking food and making utmost efforts for the attainment of the highest truth. Gradually, the light of wisdom dawned upon him dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

Out of compassion for all living beings he now decided to preach his doctrine of enlightenment. His doctrine is pregnant with principles of love and compassion, peace and happiness which alone can bring about a lasting amelioration of all beings and lead to the ultimate deliverance of mankind.

To achieve this end one must lead one's life according to the Noble Eight-Fold Path which avoids the two extremes, a life of luxury and ease and that of severe austerity and self-mortification. This path is essentially human in character in as much as it lays no undue stress on an unknown supernatural agency which man must look forward to and depend on for his salvation.

All that it lays stress on is Right application of one-self with a right resolution for the highest achievement through right activity and moral conduct (physical, mental and verbal) guided by right view and assisted by right recollection and right concentration. This path helps man in gaining self-purification by getting rid of the three fires of lust, hatred and delusion and ultimately leads him to Nibbana, by total annihilation of all cravings so that he is no longer subject to birth, old age, disease, death, grief, lamentation, despair and so on.

In the practice of this golden mean, the Buddha placed all men on an equal footing thereby striking the heaviest blow for the first time in the history of the world on Slavery of all kinds. He did not encourage offering of prayers to and worship of any supernatural power or the mediation of any priest. It was the Buddha who for the first time raised the importance of women in society by giving them the same status as men. A common celebrate order was established for both deserving men and women.

It was again the Buddha who for the first time vehemently protested against and banned the Slaughter of dumb animal for sacrificial purposes or for food. In fact his doctrine is saturated with the spirit of “Complete toleration” and unbound loving kindness to all living beings.

Buddhism aims at establishing a universal brotherhood of all living beings by doing away with all kinds of separation. Like its highest ideal of Nibbana, Buddhism is not bound by time or space, figure or form, caste, creed or nationality. In fact, “a real Buddhist is a citizen of the world.”

Buddhism has raised the dignity of man by asking him not to depend on any external power for salvation but to seek salvation by self-exertion, self-defence, self-control, self-purification and self-enlightenment. Buddhism has completely abolished all blind faith and all meaningless sacrifices and penances for self-purification. One need not necessarily worship Buddha or go through any rites or ceremonies for entering the fold; following the path laid down by the Buddha is sufficient for one’s becoming a Buddhist. Buddha has said “He honours me best who practices my teaching best.” Those who follow the path of righteousness are the true followers of the Buddha.

Buddhism is indeed the most practical and rational of all religions that have been preached on earth. All its principles are verifiable from facts of experience. Throughout his career as a preacher and teacher of mankind, for 45 long years, the Buddha always said, “Come and see, if you find it reasonable, you accept it and if not, you are at liberty to go.” Of course, it never so happened that anybody coming in contact with Buddha ever refused to accept it. This bespeaks of the fact that Buddha was able to convince each and every one he came into contact with, of the principles he taught. As a matter of fact there has not been so far a single case of forced conversion in the history of Buddhism and yet at

one time more than one third of the world population embraced Buddhism and perhaps even to this day Buddhists exceed the number of people professing any other single religion. He held that everybody is a potential Buddha and can become a Buddha by fulfilling the perfectionary virtues sooner or later. As the wisest man on earth, Buddha was aware of the fact that the span of his life on earth was limited, that it was absolutely impossible for any one man with a limited span of life to take his message of love and compassion, peace and happiness, which was meant for people of all colours and creeds, to all the corners of the earth. For this purpose he required a band of self-sacrificing, compassionate, sincere and enthusiastic adherents capable of explaining the subtle points of his doctrine and carrying the banner of truth to various parts of the world.

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