

DO YOU PRACTISE THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS?

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Buddhism spread even before the Christian era in many parts of the world. At a time when communications were difficult when people had to cross hills and deserts, even then Buddhism was able to make itself in many parts of the world specially in the East. Even today you find many people in the world attracted by the message of Buddha. I may give you one or two illustrations: ANATOLE FRANCE in his autobiography writes "On the 1st of May, 1890, chance made me to visit Maize Gilli in Paris. There standing in the silence and simplicity of the Gods of Asia my eyes fell on the statue of the Buddha, who beckoned to suffering humanity to develop understanding and compassion. If ever a God walked on this earth, I felt, here was He. I felt like kneeling down to him. ANATOLE FRANCE IS KNOWN TO be a skeptic in terms of Atheists.

Reviewing a book in the *Stateman* in 1923 Burtrend Russell said "Of all religions which prevail in the world, I am attracted to early Buddhism. *Gener Sir* left an image of the Buddha as a legacy to Winston Churchill and said "If ever your mind gets perturbed and perplexed, I want you to see this image and be comforted. What is it that makes the message of the Buddha so attractive to people who have cultivated their intellectuals? It is because this message has something which is deeply rational and profoundly spiritual. Rational because He looks at the world, finds out what the problems of that quest. He gets out of the Prince's home, looks at the world, sees the image of a dead man, an old man, and says "Is this world full of death, sickness and old age?" Are we to be content with sickness, old age and death or is there a way out?" That was the quest which he tried to pursue. When he saw a monk, a shramana, He asked him "what are you doing?" He gave the answer –

That was what the fourth image, namely the monk, explained to the Buddha. Buddha then said "Why should I not pursue that path? Many people in this country have left their homes to lead a homeless life and become wanderers, in pursuit of spiritual perfection. Why should I not undertake a similar journey?" That was the idea that occurred to Buddha and he took it up and began to pursue love, wandered in the forests, interrogated many preachers, tried to find out what the secret of the things was and then came to realise that unless he conquered his own passions the quest cannot be fulfilled. The quest is attainable only by conquest of one's own appetites, passions etc. Then he sat under the

Bodhi tree, determined not to move out of that place, until he was able to reach the end of his quest, the end of his perfection. Then his body decayed, he became thin and lean, and so many temptations were put before him to get out of that place. He overcame all those temptations and rose up as the Buddha, the awakened one, the enlightened one. He found out the clue to emancipation – what to be done. Coming from Bodh Gaya, where he attained enlightenment, he came to Sarnath and he gave his sermon – DHARMA CHAKRA PRAVARTANA (Turning the wheel of life). This is the place, hallowed by Buddha's spirit, where his sermon was delivered. His sermon starts by saying that "Man's moral life consists in a world of two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. Nothing is to be gained by indulging your appetites and passions.

Nothing is to be gained by mortifying your pleasures. You must adopt the middle path, the "MADHYAMA MARGA." That is what He taught and then He came down to answer the four truths. Life is suffering, suffering is a cause, there is a way out, there is Nirvana possible. The four fundamental truths were enunciated for the first time in this neighbourhood, in Sarnath. Life is suffering. Everyone agrees, so far as that proposition is concerned. He does not ask you to admit any thing on authority. He was a rationalist thinker. He was an empirical thinker. He wanted you to look at the world and find out what the facts of this world are. You find out that the facts of the world are that ALL IS SUFFERING (This world is full of sorrow, is full of suffering). There is nothing here which can be regarded as eternal. Everything is transitory. Everything passes away. Nothing abides, nothing steady. Every thinker starts from his religious quest with a profound dissatisfaction of this world. If this world satisfied us, there would be no incentive to think of another world. It is because this world is full of facts of sorrow. One does not want to be content with that. We will ask "Is there a way out?" The Upanishad thinkers said "Lead me from unreal to the real. Lead me from darkness to light. Lead me from death to immortality." This world is unreal, this world is a victim of death, this world is subject to darkness. If this were all, then man would be a contemptible being. He would not have any kind of satisfaction in this world.

The Christian preachers tell us about the Crucified God. This is not the end. Crucifixion is not the end. The resurrection, the spiritual recovery, that is the goal. So, every religion tells us that this world, as it is, is as you discover it, as you look at it. As you find it empirical, you find, it is something unsatisfactory. What is it due to? Why are we in this dissatisfied position? The second principle tells us craving, desire, selfishness, ignorance and thirst. Ignorance and desire are the cognitive aspect of one fundamental fact of our dissatisfaction. If you are

able to overcome your ignorance, if you are able to devour your thirst and sacrifice it, if it is possible for you to get rid of your Avidya, your ignorance, you will get benefit, you will get enlightenment but, that you have to do not by easy means. Overcome your thirst, it is easy to say, it is difficult to do. Therefore, the Buddha said, "It is the inner transformation that has to be affected. Man has to remake himself, has to become a different individual altogether. It is not merely beating of the trappings or visiting the Temples or muttering Mantras.

What is necessary is not external piety, not the ceremonial piety, not putting on the garbs but remaking your own self, that is necessary. He declared to us the actual path of morality. He pointed out to us how we have to adopt the different steps by which we can overcome the base of passions of our nature, get rid of all the defects which are there in our heart. Therefore, He said, you must adopt this path, then you will attain Nirvana. What is Nirvana? Does this mean cessational activity? By Nirvana, I mean the annihilation of lust, of selfishness, of stupidity, and ignorance, not of all actions. Nirvana is a state of bliss, is a state of enlightenment is a kind of Brahma Vihara, where you have the joy living in the supreme. You will there be able to develop your love for all humanity. You will not have this world of passions which divide one from another, which are racking the world today. What is the good of our professing Buddhism if we are unable to practise in our daily life? Most of these religions have failed in this world for the obvious reason that they are professional religions, not sincere religions. We do not practise what preach. Tolerance, understanding, comprehension, getting all the people together under the supreme fellowship of the Buddha, the Buddha has given us the message which is of a permanent value. It is an eternal message which is of a timeless character. But we are unworthy descendants of that Great Master. He was a man who was superior, much ahead of his time. He was a man who came out and told us what we should do if we want to recover our balance, our harmony, our love, our friendship. If we wish to live in brotherly love, this is not the way to do it. We have broken up into different sects, into different communities, into different nations and we fight with one another. As I have said, this is a world torn by strife, torn by hatred. What did the Buddha say: "Overcome anger by non-anger, overcome hatred by love." Are we doing it? Are we practising love today? If a man does not practise it, he is unworthy to call himself a follower of the Buddha. What is necessary therefore, in this world today is to suffer, to go through any amount of pain, risk one's life, lucidate one's heart and then remake oneself. From such beginnings it is possible for us to become a great Buddha. We must develop the "Bodhi" a heart of enlightenment, a heart of love, a heart of

understanding. It is that, what we have to develop. If we are able to create this, then this world will be a better place than it has been. Why is it that after 2,500 years of Buddha's teachings, the Buddhist States are unable to work together in concert, in harmony? There is no use to say, the fault is in the stars. The fault is in ourselves. We have to cleanse our hearts, we have to remake ourselves, we have to scrutinise our own nature and we have to make ourselves different from what we are. This is the lesson that the Great Buddha taught us. If we are sincere followers of our Great Master, it is our duty to follow his teachings not merely in letter but in spirit and make ourselves different. Then the world will become different.