

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

By Ven. Ambalangoda Chandrasiri Thera

THERE is a distinction between Buddhism and other world religions from beginning to end. The beginning of all other religions is God; but of Buddhism it is Godless. The end of all other religions is Salvation; but of Buddhism it is Enlightenment. At the end of six years struggle trying and testing all such asceticisms as were being practised and acclaimed during that period, The Buddha seated under what is now known as the Bodhi Tree, found Enlightenment.

To the Buddha humanity is engrossed and enveloped in the utter darkness of Avidya — ignorance, created for himself, by himself, without any such outsider as God. Having first enlightened himself, The Buddha exhorts all his adherents to take courage of conviction and seek enlightenment. They who posit God above all do so on mere imagination. Nobody has ever seen Him or will ever see Him, for the very concept of God is a figment of the Primitive Man, who found consolation in such a belief for his security of self-preservation. This he did because his capacity to penetratively understand things was very limited. This concept has been brought down from generation to generation that even today the present man, with all his education, has found it impossible to shed this idea of God, as Creator, Protector and Saviour. Man's intelligence has, today, penetrated even into space but he has no knowledge of himself, all because he still lives in that primitive concept of God.

The Buddha on the other hand, defied this reliance on outside power and braved life heroically. He studied existence both subjectively and objectively and finally realised what life is and where salvation lay.

On gaining Enlightenment by his own efforts, without any outside aid or assistance The Buddha became the Man among men, The Unique Man, The Acchariya Manussa as he terms it. In that he broke through the domain of God he is also called God of Gods. Equally so, His message is also Unique. It is simple and open. There is nothing esoteric in his Dhamma - the word signifies the whole teaching of the Buddha.

The very word Buddha means enlightened and the word Buddhist means a seeker after Enlightenment. Therefore they who fall into the view that Buddha saves, err. Akkhataro Thathagata - Buddhas only show the way. Suddhi Asuddhi paccattam, nanno annam visodhaye - Purity and the impurity are of the individual. No one can purify another. Each one must for himself gain the

knowledge leading to Enlightenment, and thereby purify himself of all the defilements. According to the Buddha, there is none that must forever be condemned to permanent Hell; nor must one suffer to bring consolation to the fancy of a God and thus be saved.

The Buddha exhorts mankind to break through the suffering and not to endure it. Suffering there is; but it is to be avoided and not embraced. What the Buddha taught was a Middle Path avoiding the extremes of worldly ways and asceticism.

The Buddha's Enlightenment brought forth an absolutely new meaning to life. The age old idea of a soul disappeared and with it also disappeared the Omnipotent God, the creator and Dictator. To the Buddha, life is a series of consciousnesses passing through varying stages, sometimes upgrading and sometimes degrading depending on the momentary set up of the mind. The phenomenal personality is merely a combination of Nama consisting of feeling, formation and consciousness and Rupa consisting of all that is of the physical nature. The former is subjective and the latter objective. This psycho-physical combination, commonly recognised as an individual is kept alive by the powers of Kamma effects. Kamma, which means volitional thoughts, rolls on, while the physic wastes away following the chemical laws governing its nature, manifesting here and there according to the strength and weakness of Kamma effects. One life span ends but to begin another. Thus the chain of existences is endless so long as the gravitation of Avidya or ignorance keeps him within the cosmos. The day the man is enlightened to the truth of life he realises the utter futility of cosmic existence, whether in a higher or lower sphere: he goes beyond cosmic gravitation into a state of tranquility to a completion of the holy life.

This, in short, is the philosophy of life in Buddhist Enlightenment. Let us now see how the Buddha, The Enlightened One functions as a person. What changes had overcome his personality and how does he act as the enlightened One.

He left the glorious royal home with all its comforts, the loving father, the beloved wife and the fond baby and went into the homeless state, in utter disgust of the conditions under which life in general exists, subject to birth, death, sorrow, lamentation and grief. But being enlightened, He returned to society with sympathetic understanding of the struggles and the aspirations of humanity. As a person on the top of a hill sees everything below very clearly, he saw clearly the suffering mass. The Buddha with his Enlightened mind read the high intentions of seeking happiness, underlying every aspiration and saw why this lasting happiness has turned out to be a mirage. Life after life they go seeking this happiness, but life after life they find it getting further and further

away from them. Some seek it in luxurious worldly ways, while others seek it in asceticism, which in its worst form is self torture, and in its highest is meditation leading the adherent, in its most successful stage to rebirth in Rupa Loka and Brahma Loka.

Buddha preached and proclaimed to mankind that happiness is a reality. It is not within reach, only because, mankind being enveloped in Avidya or ignorance, is blind to facts of life. His sympathy towards humanity was so great, that He kept on moving from place to place proclaiming to the world that escape from sorrow lay on the breaking through the veil of Avidya.

The Buddha is the embodiment of all virtues. His life hasn't a stain upon. It is ever consistent with his teaching. He is called Yathavadi thathakari - He who acts as he preaches and preaches as he acts. In the Buddha's life, two characteristics that excel all other virtues are compassion and wisdom. Every morning the first thing he did was to see with his eye of wisdom and ever compassionate heart, as to where he should go out and whom he should contact to bring solace. He proved to the world that humanity is one. All divisions of class, caste and rank are injurious to society. The subtle way, he comforted the bereaved Sujata shows His superb tact. He personally attended on the sick as in the case of Putigatta Tissa. The aged father who was robbed of his wealth by his sons and neglected thereafter, The Buddha gave guidance. His magnetic personality was a source of inspiration to everybody enoble and elevate himself both in worldly ways and spiritual states, culminating in the attainment of Nibbana!