

## **THE RELIGIOUS POSITION OF BUDDHISM**

Religion has been defined by various people in various ways. Just as religions differ from one another, so has it been in its definition. Religions as everything else in this world have risen through a cause and necessity; so when the cause and necessity is explained, religion is defined. Buddhism as such if it be called a religion is caused because of Buddha. Buddha is caused because of His Enlightenment. This Enlightenment is the culminating effect of the cause of ceaseless effort of incessant search after Truth and Reality made by Bodhisatwa, Prince Gautama Siddhartha. The cause of this ceaseless effort is the firm conviction and realization in the compassionate heart and mind of Bodhisatwa, that life and world is sorrow afflicted and sorrow laden. Bodhisatwa during countless births in his sojourn in Sansara had experienced this true characteristic of life and world – The existence of Sorrow.

It was this realization of the existence of sorrow that induced, the Bodhisatwa during countless lives of his sojourn in Sansara, to practise, develop and perfect the ten Paramis of self-sacrifice and renunciation, out of remorse and compassion towards suffering humanity. The relative value of this ethical Perfection, as we ordinary wayfarers could understand is the fact of the expansion of the heart and mind of the Bodhisatwa, to such maximum degree, the saturated point beyond the possibility of either god or man.

In the light of the Buddhist doctrine of the act, karma, Bodhisatwa had attained Perfection in the act, the Pre-requisite to Buddhahood. It was because of this ethical Perfection, during the past lives of the Bodhisatwa, that Prince Siddhartha was able to realize the existence of sorrow, inspite of the indefatigable effort and minute precautions taken by his father, King Suddhodana, to make believe that his life and world around is heaven on earth. But Prince Siddhartha was living a life of seclusion in contemplative mystery, almost like a prisoner in his lovely places and flower gardens, where everything was pleasing and beautiful, surrounded by high walls.

The heart and mind of the Prince was so afflicted with the existence of sorrow in the world, that he was not able to rest his head in Peace, unless and until a solution to the problem of ill and its ending was found. This was the necessity which caused his renunciation. In his 29th year, he renounced

all worldly pleasures, and donning the yellow garb of an ascetic, wandered forth in search of Truth and Peace.

He learned, followed and practised to the very letter, all the existing Dhamma at the time under distinguished teachers of the day. It is generally believed that Vedanta Philosophy existed at the time, which taught:-

1. Brahma, the first cause, Creator God and Atman as permanent, immutable.
2. Transmigration, reincarnation.
3. The doctrine of the act, Karma.
4. Ill, with its opposite Brahma as bliss.
5. Union with Brahma as the Summun Bonum.
6. and way or ways thereto. But he could not achieve his desired object from these sources. After six years of austerity in extreme ascetism, in search of Truth, the cause of sorrow and the way to destroy sorrow, following a Middle Path of his own, seeking within, avoiding both extremes of luxury in materialism and self-mortification in vain idealism. He realized the Truth and found the solution of the problem by the overcoming of self in Enlightenment.

The attainment of Enlightenment is a great and unique event in the life of Prince Siddhartha. “Before it, he was but only a Bodhisatwa, and with and after it, he gained the status of a perfect Buddha. The inner conviction gained through this experience, as to the nature of Reality, as to his internal purity, as well as His freedom, led to self-expression and self-assertion, which meant only the declaration of His new Personality. One person born in this world is unique, is without an equal, there is no figure similar to Him, there is no one comparable to him in figure. His mentally without an equal; he has no equal to assume a similar position; he is comparable to none one in the universe; he is comparable only to the past Incomparable Ones and is pre-eminent amongst gods and men. Who is that one person? The Buddha, absolutely Holy, worthy of adoration, Perfectly Enlightened.”

With the attainment of Buddhahood by the Prince, commenced what is now known as Buddhism, that mental Highway, different from all other roads to salvation, the wake of which proved itself to be far-reaching effects to man’s culture and civilization.

The world got a religion without any system of faith and worship, owing no allegiance to a supernatural creator or Soul, where faith is dethroned and substituted by confidence, based on investigation and knowledge. A religion without any authority, but which gives full freedom of thought, inquiry and investigation, to develop one's wisdom even to the extent of becoming a Buddha. It expounds no dogmas, that one blindly believe, no creeds that one must accept on good faith without reasoning, no superstitious rites or ceremonies and no meaningless sacrifices or penances for one's purification. It is a living force of universality which breeds untinted and limitless tolerance, love and compassion to all living creatures.

There is pain, lamentation, misery, despair, sorrow, grief, decay, disease, dissolution and disintegration in this phenomenal world, and who is there to deny? Now what the blessed One discovered was the cause and the cessation thereof, Buddha speaking to his disciples said, "It is because you and I have not properly understood and realised the Four Noble Truths that we have so long wandered about in different states of existence. Now as we have realised them, we have destroyed the craving for existence and extirpated the root of existence. Hence we shall have no more rebirths".

The Paticcasamuppada or the law of becoming is without doubt the crowning glory of Buddha's supreme Enlightenment. It enunciates the formula of Dependent Origination "That being thus, this comes to be, from the coming to be of that, this arises That being not so, this disappears". This law of becoming or Dependent Origination, is an exposition of the First and Second Noble Truths of sorrow, and the cause of sorrow. Taken in reverse order it explains the Third Noble Truth of the Cessation of sorrow. Sorrow is the effect of birth. So by the cessation of birth, sorrow ceases.

The ultimate purpose of Buddhism then, is to teach the way of Cessation of birth, in an Eight Fold Path to an objective goal Nibbana.

Our clinging to existence, taking pleasure and delight in our clinging to beliefs is a person that has persisted for well-nigh a limitless time, and is so deeply rooted in our habits and thoughts, that it is no easy task to eradicate, give up, uproot and cut off root and branch, these fetters that blind us to existence, in a short span of man's one life period. Progress in the path as indicated by the Buddha, should be consistence and of necessity gradual.

Buddhism at one stage enjoins the creation and furtherance of skilful moral actions (Kusala Karma) by which of necessity a radius of Karmic force is formed in contravention to the very principle of the ultimate aspiration of Buddhism, to bring this Karmic force to zero point. This is an important aspect of Buddhism that should be clearly and distinctly understood by every Buddhist.

The religious position of Buddhism is the example of the analogical concentric circle explained earlier.

