

THE SADDHA CONCEPT IN BUDDHISM

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The concept of confidence in Buddhism is referred to in Pali as saddha and in Sanskrit as sraddha. Saddha is not faith, as usually translated, but is confidence, born out of conviction. According to Buddhist philosophy it is a purifying mental factor in the mind and has a deeper philosophical meaning than that of mere confidence. Firstly, it is a confidence born out of understanding or conviction of the Four Noble Truths. Secondly, it is a feeling of reverence or esteem which a follower accords to a personality, or a set of doctrines. Thirdly, it implies an earnest hope of execution and realizes ethical principles of developing one's innate morality. Asanga, the Buddhist philosopher of the 4th century A.C. has pointed out three aspects of saddha:

- i) full and firm conviction that a thing is,
- ii) serene joy and good qualities and
- iii) aspiration, or wish to achieve an object in view.

Whatever it may be, it has very little to do with the ardent follower of the Buddha's teaching. Buddhism places emphasis on seeing (dassana) things in their true perspective; not on the faith or selfish desire for self-survival which blinds man. If he sees clearly, even the so-called Self (Atman) does not and cannot exist. It is very important that one who wishes to obtain unfailing success in spiritual progress must have confidence in the Dhamma because such development is based mainly on confidence. Because inner development is so based, one who lacks it, is sure to fall from his virtue and practice of meditation. Confidence is the first of seven treasures (saddhadhana) of the nobles (ariyas). It is the first mental power (bala); it is the first ethical faculty (indriya) of the mind. It has such great magnetic power which generates essential mental properties of energy, mindfulness, concentration and right understanding. It also eliminates the mental hindrances of sensual desire (kamacchanda), ill will (vyapada), obduracy of mind and mental factors (thinamiddha), restlessness and anxiety (uddhaccakukkucca), and uncertainty (vicikiccha). It maintains a brightness and clearness of the mind.

Confidence in the Dhamma begins with a temporary conviction of a morally wholesome object; but gradually it develops to a form of unshakeable trust in the Perfect One, his teaching and his noble order. The Buddha has denounced blind faith and pointed out that it cannot help his follower in any way in his self-purification. He always emphasized that one should believe in his teaching only after having understood it. He often praised the one who is endowed with

confidence based on knowledge. This confidence is called *saddha* in Buddhist terminology. The understanding on which it is based may sometimes be weak and sometimes strong. The Buddha has compared *saddha* to the confidence which a patient has in his doctor, or a student in his teacher. The more benefits the patient receives from his doctor's treatment and advice, the more *saddha* he has in him. Similarly, the more easily the student learns his lessons and the more successfully he passes his examination, the more confidence he has in his teacher. If the doctor's prescription does his patient no good, the patient begins to lose his *saddha*. In his own teaching the Buddha has said: "As a wise man tests gold on a touchstone, heating and cutting, so you, monks, should test my words by practice, and not accept them simply due to the reverence towards me." The Buddhists' confidence in the Buddha is just the kind one has in a physician or teacher. They have substantial ground for it. The teachings of the Buddha offer them what they can believe in first of all intellectually because it conforms to what they can see and prove empirically as to the nature of the world. They know that his method is effective in putting an end to unhappy conditions. Lastly, it invites them to 'come and see' (*ehipassiko*) for themselves. They are asked only to suspend their doubts until after they have clear proof by direct experience that the teaching is acceptable. This comes with the first (*jhana*) attainment, after which normal doubts arise no more.

In the Buddha's teaching the supreme power is the natural law of Cause and Effect from which comes the moral order of *Kamma* or volitional action (*cetana*) and results (*vipaka*). The ethical teaching of the Buddha is intrinsically a part of man's highest purpose, which is to gain his release from the painful condition of repeated births called *samsara*. The Buddha has said he only points out the way exactly as the doctor advises treatment for his patient: "It is for you to exert and practise, Tathagatas only point out the way."

The Buddha is regarded as a teacher (*sattha*). After realizing the Truth himself, he has taught it to the world. Buddhism is not a revelation but a path to deliverance discovered by the Buddha through his own efforts. Out of compassion he taught it to humanity. He asked them to test its validity in the light of their own reason, understanding and experience. The Buddha most emphatically warned his disciples against putting blind faith in the authority of his Triple Canon (*Tripitaka*) or tradition. This is clear from a formal discourse called *Kalama Sutta*, the Charter of Free Inquiry given by the Buddha. He said in it: "Come, O *Kalamas*, do not go upon tradition; do not go upon hearsay; do not go upon correspondence with the scriptures; do not go upon supposition; do not go upon inference; do not go upon mere reasoning (logic); do not go upon your pre-conceived notions; do not go upon a person's seeming ability; do not go upon the thought that this ascetic is our teacher. But *Kalamas*, when you yourselves know (by observation, experience and right judgment) 'such things are good; such things are harmless; such things are praised by the wise; such

things when undertaken and followed lead to good and welfare' then you should accept and follow such thing." The Buddha never attempted to persuade his followers to have blind and submissive faith in him or in his teaching. He taught his disciples in the ways of intelligent enquiry. The enquiring Kalamas he answered: "It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful." He did not want us to accept anything that did not accord with truth and reason. He asks us to perceive things as they really are (yathabhuta).

On one occasion a millionaire named Upali, a fervent follower of Nigantha Nathaputta (i.e. Mahavira, the founder of Jainism), approached the Buddha, thoughtfully listened to his teaching, saddha arose in him and forthwith he expressed his willingness to become a follower of the Buddha. But the Buddha said: "Of a truth, Upali, make thorough investigation." Then in his great delight Upali said: "Had I manifested my readiness to become a follower of another creed surely they would have taken me round the city in procession and proclaimed that such and such a millionaire had embraced their Faith. But, Sir, your reverence counsels me to make further investigation. I feel the more delighted at this saying of yours." Upali then sought refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

According to the Buddha one should not follow the teacher blindly nor seek refuge in the hope that he will be saved by the personal salvation, saintliness or mere glimpses of serene personality of the master. He should not aspire to be purified by the master's own purification.

Vakkali, a Brahmin who was proficient in the Vedas, became a monk. He was never tired of having glimpses of the Buddha and he spent all his time following him about. The Buddha said to him: "O Vakkali, what is the use of seeing my foul body. One who sees the dhamma sees me."

The early Buddhist scriptures are contained in the Pali Canon which the disciples of the Buddha compiled at Rajagaha in Northern India under the patronage of King Ajatasattu after the passing away of the Buddha. It is quite possible that in the course of the twenty-five centuries which have elapsed since then some interpolation may have crept in here and there. Still, it can be said with full confidence that this collection of books is the nearest and the most reliable source of the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddhists read these books in order to understand the teachings of the Buddha and to get inspiration to follow the path taught by him. They are regarded as the advice of the great teacher to his disciples. They are not to be accepted and believed, but to be understood and practised.

The Buddha has likened his Dhamma to a raft: "I teach you, O monks the doctrine which is like a raft to be used to cross over (the stream of existence, not

as something to hold fast to.” “A man comes by a great stretch of water and sees no way of crossing to the opposite shore which is safe and secure. He fashions a raft out of sticks, branches, leaves and grass and lashings and uses it to cross over to the opposite bank. Suppose now, O monks, he were to say, ‘this raft has been of such use to me that I will therefore put it on my head, and carry it with me as I proceed on my journey’ ... will he be doing the correct thing with this raft?” The monks agreed this action was not correct and the Buddha added the obvious answer: “Even so, O monks, the doctrine taught by me is for crossing over and not for holding fast.” Merely to hold fast means to adopt the ‘labels’ of the belief, without taking the trouble to practise what the belief advises, implies or involves. In one of the discourses the Buddha warned a Brahmin not to rush to any hasty conclusion about him or the path he has shown or his disciples who were on that path. In everything here are degrees and grades and one should not think of anything as belonging to the highest state in the absence of sufficient evidence. He went on to explain this fact with the help of the elephant simile: “An ordinary man on entering a forest sees a large, long footprint and comes to the conclusion. ‘Indeed it is the footprint of the great royal elephant.’ But the skilled elephant tracker looking at the footprint would say: ‘This is not necessarily the footprint of the royal elephant. There are stunted she elephants who also have such large footprints.’ The skilled elephant tracker follows the footprints until he perceives the elephant’s shoulder knocking against trees at a high level and grazing off high things in the forest. Even then he does not come to the conclusion that one of them is the footprint of the royal elephant as there are other elephants too who could cause the same condition as the great royal elephant himself. Just so, the individual should go through various stages in inner development and not count each as the most perfect stage, but persevere until he ultimately comes to the realization of the Truth.”

The Buddha says: “Confidence is an assistant to a person; actually understanding properly commands him.”

Taking refuge in the Buddha implies no personal guarantees that he himself will answer for his followers. The Buddha says: “Surely by oneself is evil done; by oneself one becomes pure. Purity and impurity depend on the individual, no one can purify another.” With reference to the goal, he declared: “Having properly understood and experienced each for oneself (sayam abhinna sacchikatva).

According to the doctrine of kamma, future happiness is a direct result or continuance of the maintaining of a satisfactory standard of conduct in the present. One’s action in the past must produce its effect in the present and in the future. One reaps the results of one’s actions, good or bad, and there is no means of avoiding results on the strength of the moral excellence of another

person. The best that can be done is to cut down the evil action and increase the good action. There is freedom of will and there must be cultivation of vision and discernment to detect what choice should be made. The Buddha stresses the cultivation of discernment since blind faith is not encouraged and the individual is warned against pursuing the wrong course. From the Dhamma text we get: "If by renouncing relatively small happiness one sees a greater happiness by comparison, the wise man abandons the lesser in favour of the greater happiness." It is therefore necessary that one should be willing to discern a possible comparison and be able to draw it.

In the light of this explanation how to understand the nature of devotion shown by the Buddhists when they get to the temple? In the temple one finds the image of the Buddha which serves as a token of inspiration. He finds it helpful in concentrating on his teaching. He also makes an offering in the shrine. The offering of flowers and incense expresses his homage and gratitude and indicates no intrinsic value. His offerings are his recognition of the Buddha's sublime qualities. They are an outward indication that he takes the Buddha and Dhamma as his guide. He accepts the way of life as laid down by the Buddha.

Almost all religions refer to confidence in terms of faith. The Buddha, however, urged his followers to see and to understand things for themselves.

