



DHAMMAKAMI
BUDDHIST SOCIETY

WHY SHOULD YOU LEARN BUDDHISM?

Summary of Dhamma Talk by Venerable K. Rathanasara on March 18, 2018

Why should you learn Buddhism? Buddhism is a man oriented, human centric, and earthbound religion, making it unique and different from other beliefs. This is an intricate subject and we need to have a deeper understanding for a better appreciation.

The Buddha is neither a god nor divine being. The Buddha is a human being, not an ordinary human being, but an extraordinary human being with extraordinary qualities and abilities. One day, a Brahmin named Dona, upon seeing the Buddha's majestic, serene, and peaceful appearance, asked the Buddha is He a divine being, devil, spirit, or human being. The Buddha replied that he is neither a divine being, devil, nor spirit, as these beings have greed, hatred, and delusion, all of which He has eradicated; He is also not an ordinary human being, because greed, hatred, and delusion are found in the minds of ordinary human beings, but the Buddha has uprooted all these defilements.

The Buddha's teachings come from His own realizations. In His first Discourse, the Buddha shares that after achieving enlightenment, it arose in Him vision, knowledge, wisdom, and insight to things unheard before. The Buddha is thus known as the supremely enlightened one who has no other teacher that is equal to Him. The Buddha is also the teacher of gods and humans, as evident in some Discourses, where it is mentioned that even some divine beings approached the Buddha for questions and clarifications.

The Buddha does not demand blind faith for His teachings. In fact, He gives us much freedom to think and analyse. The Buddha encourages us to come and do thorough investigation on the teachings that He has realized and proclaimed to the world as the Truth. The Buddha further proclaimed that disciples too can achieve the same status of enlightenment as the teacher, and He teaches us how to follow this path to get living experience of enlightenment.

In the Kalama Sutta, people consulted the Buddha which religious teacher should they believe as all proclaimed that their own religion is the only true religion. The Buddha teaches that we should not believe anything just because it is written in sacred books, passed down from generation to generation, believed by many people, or said by a clever speaker or respected teacher. Instead, we should analyse and scrutinise, and then adopt those which are understood to be good, and avoid those which are bad. So analysing, scrutinising, and questioning, is very much encouraged in Buddhism.

Buddhism gives due credit to human kind, and teaches that human beings have the potential to become enlightened and only human beings have the potential to become a Buddha. As human beings, we are responsible for our own purity and impurity. If we do evil, wicked, immoral, unwholesome deeds through our thoughts, words, and actions, then we are defiled and we create our own hell and miseries. On the other hand, by adopting wholesome, positive, and constructive thoughts, words, and actions, we are purified. So the



Buddha gives due credit to human credibility and intelligence, and recognises that humans are mature enough to be responsible and accountable to ourselves.

In Buddhist practice, the Buddha does not make human beings subordinate to any supernatural powers, and we do not pray to gods nor divine beings for intervention, salvation, or freedom. Instead, we perform meritorious deeds and then share the merits with the divine beings. Having shared the merits, sometimes we might seek the divine beings' blessings but such blessings are for helping with our day-to-day lives, not for the purpose of going to heaven or gaining enlightenment.

Buddhists can also be born in heaven. Buddhists are encouraged to do good deeds, accumulate sufficient merits, and be born in heaven if they so wish. However, being born in heaven is something that can be achieved only after death. In Buddhism, being born in heaven is not our final spiritual goal – the final goal of the Buddhist, which is enlightenment, is achievable while we are living here and now, not after death.

Buddhism is a "Do It Yourself" kind of religion, where we must walk the path ourselves, not through mere beliefs. The Buddha teaches the Dhamma for us to cultivate ourselves, gives us the Dhamma as a torchlight to find our way and as the path to enlightenment, but we must walk this path ourselves. The Dhamma is likened to a roadmap that shows us how to get from Point A to B, but we must walk there ourselves, no one is going to carry us there.

In Buddhist practice, three things are essential: understanding, practice, and realisation. Understanding and practice must go hand in hand in order to realise Nibbana. This is achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path to develop our ethical, spiritual, and intellectual qualities. So Buddhism is for people who are energetic and striving, who are investigative, who ask questions and analyse, and who are ready to take the challenge to test the teachings. Hundreds and thousands of human beings have understood the teachings of the Buddha, practised, and achieved enlightenment – this path is also open to us.

There are many other reasons why we should learn Buddhism, but the above is enough to convince us to start learning. Rather than believing in what has been taught, take the first step to come and learn, practise, and experience it personally.