

# Buddhism as basic wisdom

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PARIMAL MUTSUDOLI

THE Holy Buddha Purnima is the most sacred occasion for the Buddhist community of Bangladesh as well as for the global Buddhist community. It signifies the three important events in the Buddha's life: his birth, enlightenment and great demise. All these three events took place on the full moon of the sixth lunar month of Vesakh.

The Buddha was born in 623 BC. His father was King Suddhadana, and mother was Queen Mahamaya. Before enlightenment, the Buddha was known by his clan name of Siddhartha Gotama. He was extremely intelligent and compassionate, and it was predicted that he would become either a universal monarch or a Buddha.

Despite the comfort and luxury of a royal household, prince Siddhartha left home at age twenty and became a wandering ascetic. He laboured for six long years experimenting with all kinds of spiritual practices and meditation. Then, on the full moon day of the month of Vesakha, at exactly thirty-five years of age, he attained enlightenment and became Buddha, 'the enlightened one'.

The Buddha started working hard to

spread his teachings and to enlighten the people. During the forty-five years of his mission, he was able to establish his religion, which is now globally known as Buddhism. His followers came from all walks of life -- traders and peasants, Brahmins and outcastes, the rich and the poor, the intellectual and the ordinary. Buddhism is now one of the major world religions and an influential civilising force in human history.

Buddhism is a religion of self-help. Buddhist Philosophy places man at the centre of all things. It advises man to strive and work hard to achieve his material and spiritual goals, through his own efforts, not only through prayer or mere wishful thinking.

Buddhism discourages blind faith and urges man to think freely. It teaches that all men are capable of attaining the highest state of spiritual liberation. Buddhism also teaches that all men are born equal and are free to choose whatever is best for them.

Many of the Buddha's principles can be understood through logical reasoning, others can be realised through a proper process of experimentation. The teaching of Buddha, though very old, is still valid and practical, and can be followed with advantage by all people of the

world.

Buddhism teaches man to be kind and gentle. The Buddhists are therefore supposed to be peace-loving people and have never made war, or any kind of violence, in the name of the religion.

There are three objects of the highest veneration in the Buddhist religion -- the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha (the Holy Triple Gem). The Buddha possesses the noblest virtues and the highest wisdom. In brief his virtues are infinite wisdom, perfect purity, and universal compassion.

The Dharma is the teaching of Buddha. It is the Universal Law, which the Buddha discovered and taught the world. In it is the truth itself. And because the Dharma is Truth, it must be true, valid, and universal at all time and in all planes.

The Sangha is the Holy Order of Monks who have attained a high degree of spiritual discipline. The Buddhists pay respect to the Sangha because they are highly spiritual and always try to do good to others. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are closely interrelated. All the three are essential for the rise and the spread of the religion.

The Buddha has advised against two extremes, which should not be practiced by Monks. These two extremes are sensual indulgence and self-mortification, as these are not appropriate for holy life. The path that the Buddha advises us to follow is called the Middle path or the Noble Eight fold path, which avoids the two extremes. It consists of eight factors, namely: right understanding, right thought, right



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Buddhism discourages blind faith and urges everyone to think freely.

speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

In brief the Lord Buddha states the following as the four 'Noble Truths' -- existence is suffering (dukkha), Suffering is cursedly giving (tanha), there is the end of suffering, i.e. nirvana.

The Noble Eight-fold path is the way leading to the extinction of Suffering. The four points in the first sermon are collectively called the "Four Noble Truths". They are the embodiment of the whole teaching of the Lord Buddha.

The Buddha left an invaluable legacy of spiritual heritage, which has

spread over the world for last 2,553 years. This day is therefore known as the day of "Buddha Purnima" as it commemorates the three important events in the Buddha's life.

Parimal Mutsudoli is Secretary General of the Buddhist Peace Federation.

# Quest for harmony

The world is based on cause and effect, and also the shared Karma of humans. The change of our habitat needs to start with change of our minds. Buddhism inevitably can provide the contemporary environmental philosophy and environmental preservation.

ASHOKE BARUA

THE Second World Buddhist Forum, an international conference of Buddhists was held in Wuxi, an eastern city of Jiangsu province of China and in Taipei of Taiwan from March 28 to April 01 this year. With the theme "A Harmonious World, A Synergy of Conditions," the event was jointly organised by Buddhist Association of China (BAC), Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA), Hong Kong Buddhist Association and China Religious Cultural Communication Association (CRCCA).

The main objective of the conference was to set up an open, high-level platform for equality and pluralism, to care for living beings, and to respect and protect Buddhism. Along with the 13-member Bangladesh delegation, including this writer, more than 1700 Buddhists and scholars from about 50 countries and regions put their heads together to discuss how Buddhism could contribute to building a harmonious world.

The vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Du Qinglin also spoke, among others, on the occasion. "We anticipate that the Buddhism circle in the world will continue to carry forward the spirit of 'Harmony and Synergy' that manifests the feelings of mercy and compassion, reclaim people's internal spirits, help to

resolve the difficulties so as to promote the harmonious co-existence between man and nature, man and society, man and man as well as man's internal world," said Du Qinglin, who is also the Head of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee.

A series of exhibition on Buddhist relics, porcelain, handicrafts, photos and calligraphy and a session of group photo also attracted the participants. The "Song of Auspicious" an epic play, interspersed with cinema, titled "Blessing Ode" was staged at the closing session. It was based on the story of Shakyamuni, the prince who renounced his throne and became a mendicant to seek the truth, and went through hard austerities, diligent practices and attained Supreme Enlightenment.

Buddhism was introduced in Wuxi during Chiuwu period of the Three Kingdoms in 280 AD. Historically famous Buddhist monasteries, some 1000-year old temples like the Nanchan Monastery, the Chong' An Monastery, and Hangfu Monastery are located there.

The seminar on Spiritual Environmental Preservation in Buddhism was held at Dharma Drum Degui Learning Center, an institution of Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Foundation. As the topic elaborated: "The earth that humanity resides in is facing progressive worsening of the environment and increasing shortage of resources. 'Situation is created by mind'.

The world is based on cause and effect, and also the shared Karma of humans. The change of our habitat needs to start with change of our minds. Buddhism inevitably can provide the contemporary environmental philosophy and environmental preservation undertak-

ing rich thought resources and practical experiences of 'pure mind, pure land'. World Buddhists and Buddhist scholars are duty-bound on how to sublime the realm of the mind and social responsibility among the present generation that are lost in the industrialisation and



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Buddhism carries the spirit of harmony and synergy.

lifestyle of consumerism."

During the five-day event the participants exchanged ideas on how to better preserve Buddhist music and the Tripitaka. They have talked about the relationship between Buddhism and science, Buddhism and public welfare, Buddhism and environment protection etc.

The Forum was the second historical event in the history of Chinese Buddhism. The First World Buddhist Forum was the first-ever international general assembly of Buddhists held in China (April 13 - 18, 2006) in Hangzhou city and Zhoushan city of Zhejiang province, China.

Throughout the duration of these five days, the delegates participated in eighteen sub-forums, focusing on eighteen respective topics based on the theme "A Harmonious World; A Synergy of Conditions". The Forum finally reached the following conclusions:

- To enhance the practicality and propagation of Buddhism so as to revitalise the glory of Dharma.
- To value monastic education and enhance the cultivation of talents to ensure the continued lineage of Buddhist propagators.
- To develop a process in guiding Buddhist practice and learning, with particular emphasis on practical experience of spiritual cultivation.
- To introduce the universal value of Buddhist art to the world.
- To enhance communication between Buddhism and the local culture of a given place to develop a Buddhist culture specific to the region.
- To increase the interaction between Buddhist education and higher education, which will allow mutual assistance and development.
- To bring the Buddhist ideas of charity

and public welfare into the business world, where group work would help pursue welfare for the society.

- To share the Buddhist thoughts and views on the myriad beings in the universe with the rest of the world.
- To broaden the scope of exchange among Buddhists across the Strait and Four Regions, increase mutual understanding, and strengthen the bonds for cooperation.
- To actualise the vision of the "New Six Harmonies" through the wisdom of tolerance.
- To continue the development of Buddhist art and culture so as to spread the honour of Buddhism into the world.
- To enhance Buddhist care for earth and humanity, and value preservation of the spiritual environment.
- To spread the Buddhist spirit of compassion to every corner of this world.
- To join and unite as one under the blessings of the Buddha.
- To value the Buddhist Vinaya in order to institutionalise the Buddhist orders.
- To broaden the content of Buddhist propaganda, placing particular emphasis on Buddhism's relevance to everyday life and promotion of Humanistic Buddhism.
- To enhance exchange and mutual assistance between different nations of the world.
- To ensure that the righteous Dhamma remains for eternity, so that not only will its humanistic character be maintained, it will not fall behind either.

The Forum announced that "only with a united heart will there be harmony; and only with the respect will there be peace."

Ashoke Barua is General Secretary, Bangladesh Buddhist Federation.

# Buddhism and practical thoughts

The history of mankind is littered with violence. But, history has proved that violence cannot destroy violence. On the other hand, violence invites greater violence. Ideological conquest is a matter of giving and taking through peaceful means. This is non-violence, the Buddhist way.

SUKOMAL BARUA

THE Buddha's teachings have a basis issued from simple observation of the facts of daily life. The words of the Blessed One still remain in the modern world. They are modern because they are simple in expression and concern the human nature and no particular societal system. The simplicity of these words is the source of power of this teaching and allows Buddhism to become universal by adjusting to civilisations.

The basis of Lord Buddha's teachings

is derived from the experience of his life. To render the world better and humanity better, it is necessary that the example of the Buddha and his words as the education of life is followed and acquired by all above all differences. To some, the teaching of the Buddha is a religion while to others it is a philosophy. As a whole, it really asserts a way of life. It is a way of moral, spiritual and intellectual training leading to complete freedom of mind.

The Buddha himself called his teachings Dhamma-Vinaya, meaning "the doctrine and the discipline". Buddhism,

in the strictest sense of the word, cannot be called just a religion. For, if by religion it is meant "action or conduct indicating belief in, reverence for and desire to please a divine ruling power, the exercise or practice of rites or observances implying this, recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship," then Buddhism does not possess such characteristics of a religion.

A Buddhist takes refuge in the Buddha (Buddham Saranam Gacchami) but not in the hope that he will be saved by the Master. The Buddha is only a teacher who points out the way and guides the followers to their individual deliverance. To a Buddhist, the men who saw 'Truth' are true helpers; he never prays to them, he only pays reverence to the revealers of truth for having pointed out the path to true happiness and deliverance. Happiness is what one must achieve of oneself. Purity and impurity also depend

on oneself. The Buddha encourages his followers to live according to the Dhamma, which shows clearly that it is the highest importance to train oneself mentally, verbally and bodily to step along the way to seek happiness and a right life.

In Buddhism, wisdom is of the highest importance. Purification comes through wisdom and understanding. But the Buddha never praised mere intellect. According to him, knowledge should go hand in hand with purity of heart, with moral excellence (vijjacaranasampanna). Wisdom gained by understanding and development of the qualities of mind and heart is wisdom par excellence (Bhavanamaya Panna). Thus it is clear that Buddhism is an encouragement of a practical application of the teaching that leads the follower to dispassion, enlightenment and final deliverance, where one gets eternal peace and happiness.

Buddhism holds its keen appeal in

contemporary times when traditional religious values are being questioned in the intellectual skepticism of the time. A modern man may be disillusioned with conventional ideas, blind faith, cults and dogmas as much as he is immersed into scientific thoughts that have shattered many old myths and unveiled mysteries of human existence. Progress of science and technology during the last two hundred years has opened new frontiers of thoughts.

Buddha was a friend, because he had profound love for his disciples. He was a philosopher, because the thought for their welfare and indicated the path leading to happiness. He was also a guide, because he gave them guidance in order to enable them to achieve cherished goals through action. Buddhism has a human approach. It aims at individual perfection leading to spiritual attainment and collective good for the society.

The history of mankind is littered with

violence. But, history has proved that violence cannot destroy violence. On the other hand, violence invites greater violence. In the whole process of human advancement, the conqueror and the vanquished have fought violently. But ideological conquest is much greater than physical conquest. Ideological conquest is a matter of giving and taking through peaceful means. This is non-violence, the Buddhist way.

Today we are living in a scientific age in which every aspect of life is influenced by modern science. Nevertheless, from its very beginning, the teachings of the Buddha are always open to scientific thinking. Buddha never encouraged rigid, dogmatic belief. He allowed great flexibility and freedom of thought. Sabbe Satta Sukhita Hontu -- may all beings be happy.

Sukomal Barua is Chairman, Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Dhaka.