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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa

Buddhist Discussion Centre Australia

33 Brooking Street, Upwey, Victoria 3158, Australia

Email: wbu@bdcu.org.au

Website: www.bdcu.org.au

Associated Institution of the World Buddhist University

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May You Be Well and Happy

Summary

The following talk was given by Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda of the Buddhist Missionary Society, Buddhist Temple, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to a group of devotees. It has been transcribed from a video tape. Part 1 of this talk is produced in the Buddha Dhyana Dana Review Vol 2. No. 2, June 1992. Further installments will appear in future Reviews.

Why Buddhism?

The subject that you have given for me to discuss is 'Why Buddhism'. This is a very interesting subject.

In spite of various other religions, why is it necessary for us to maintain, to promote, another religion known as Buddhism? Have we got enough reasons to prove the uniqueness or the importance of this way? If not, can you single out that there are some extraordinary characteristics or features in this religion which we cannot find in other existing religions?

Usually, people practise their religion as their cultural heritage; their tradition according to their family background. Those who happen to be born into Christian families, they practise Christianity. They try to justify Christianity; they try to point out Christianity is the only important religion in this world. That is their duty because they think that it is our religion. Because of that feeling; our, our religion; they try to show that Christianity is more important than other religions. And those who are born in Buddhist families also try to do the same thing, although they are reluctant to say that Buddhism is the only true religion in this world. Even then, they try to show others that Buddhism is higher, greater, than all the other existing religions; and Muslims and Hindus also do the same thing because they feel that it is their duty; they are bound to do this to promote our religion.

The idea is good but the attitude is not very good; not very healthy. Because of this attitude, we face enormous conflict, pressures, misunderstanding, jealousy, grudges, discriminations. We have to consider this very carefully because the main purpose of religion, any religion: is to introduce peace, happiness, contentment, harmony, unity, understanding, co-operation, righteous way of life, noble life. If these qualities are not there, there is no meaning at all for practising any religion. If these qualities are not there; if they cannot practise, uphold, these good qualities; better to do away with religion.

To understand 'Why Buddhism', we have to go back 2500 years of history of Buddhism. Then you can understand why Buddhism is needed. When the Buddha appeared in India, at that time they had more than enough religions in that country. When you read Brahma Gala Sutta in Digha Nihaya; a very

long Sutta; you can see at that time there were sixty-two religions in India. The Buddha, before his renunciation and gaining his enlightenment, studied under various religious teachers, studying art, language, science, technology, philosophy, psychology and meditation. Even then he could not satisfy. He realised he could not gain what he wanted after studying all those existing religions and sciences and philosophies. That is why he had decided to find out whether there is another method where he can find the answers.

There was a very big problem which has been bothering in his mind from his childhood. He discussed this method with various other religious teachers. He could not gain the satisfactory answer. What is that?

As a young prince, one day when he was sitting in the garden, he saw a snake suddenly appear and caught a frog or lizard. Now lizard is struggling to escape. The snake is trying to swallow. When this battle was going on, another bird came down from the sky, taking away the snake. The frog is still in the mouth. Then this has become the turning point for him to think very deeply about the living; survival. What a big battle is going on in this world for their survival; for their living; for their pleasure. Why is it difficult to organise or to create for living beings to exist without facing such big battles, facing fear without suffering? This was the question.

When you study the existence of all those living beings in the water, in the jungle and in the society, each and every living being depends on another living being. Prey on and catch. Then fight, then cry, then suffer, then die. Then what is the purpose of living in this way. Almost every minute we have fears. Fear of death, and there are thousands and one things for us to create fear, then worry.

Then where is the pleasure, where is the happiness, where is the satisfaction? What is the purpose in the end? What will we gain? Nothing. All day and night we are worrying and worrying, and thinking and thinking; how many commitments, how many responsibilities, how many disturbances, how many disappointments are there? One scholar has said 'If I have recorded all the pleasant and unpleasant experiences that I had during my lifetime, I can see only according to the hours which I calculate, only one week, but the rest of my life I spend with fears, worries, problems, difficulties, suffering, disappointment, un-satisfactoriness. This is the nature of existence'.

So this young prince was thinking very deeply why living beings appear in this world. Then people say 'Well, somebody create them'. Then the counter question - why would he want to create like this, allowing these creatures to suffer? And what is the difficulty for him to create, if he has got the power and the authority to create; and what is the difficulty for him to create all these living beings to exist without facing such problems and worries and suffering? He could not get the answer. Then he tries to find out the answer. He got the answer. 'Why Buddhism' starts from there.

Because all the other existing religions at that time could not give the correct

answer to this question. What did they do? One group, all day and night going on praying and praying and reciting and offerings and worshipping in the name of God, thinking that God is responsible for everything.

But the Buddha; at that time he was not the Buddha; the Buddha could not agree with this. Later he said, simply by praying or worshipping or offering to anybody in this world in the name of any god or bodhisattvas or the Buddha, or any supernatural living beings, it is impossible for you to find out your final liberation and salvation; unless, until you work for them. You can pray; no harm. There is a saying; belief in God is very good. Pray and worship and do some offering in the name of that God for your protection. Very good, no harm. Nobody in this world can say it is wrong. Very good. But don't forget to lock the door when you go out at night time. There is no guarantee that God will protect your house until you come back.

That is what the Buddha says. 'Why Buddhism' starts from there.

In the West, many people introduce Buddhism as 'Do It Yourself' religion. The new title for Buddhism - Do It Yourself. That means Buddhism is not a lazy man's religion. Just go and pray and worship. Ask somebody else to do the job for you, send you to heaven. Buddhism is not that type of religion. But Buddhism is not against worshipping or praying or offering to any God. If you like, you can do so. We never say those who worship to God go to hell. So the Buddha did not accept that belief, that we can find out our salvation only by praying and worshipping to any God without working for that.

Another method. Some people believe that by torturing their physical body; burning, cutting, starving, without sleeping, without eating, without taking medicines when they are sick; the more they torture their physical body, more easily they can get rid of the sins committed by them, then find out their salvation. This belief was very common at that time; even today in certain countries.

Then the Buddha says, simply by torturing your physical body, you won't be able to get rid of the effect of the bad deeds or the bad karmas that you have committed, because your deeds are not done by the physical body. Mind is the culprit. Body cannot do anything if the body did not get the order from the mind. If you want to torture, punish, you must punish your mind, not the body.

Then how are you going to punish your mind. Mind is crazy, mind is jealous, mind is greedy, mind is stupid, mind is wicked; punish all those things then you can get it off the bad effects that you have committed. That means train your mind, purify your mind, cultivate more and more good deeds. Then you can overcome, you can avoid for the time being. Then you can develop very easily to find out your salvation, not by torturing your physical body.

Another group, they believe by taking holy bath in certain holy rivers and some other places, they can wash away all the sins committed by them. Here in this country also some people come to temples to wash away their sins.

Then what is the good of this? If you think you can wash away the sins committed by you by taking holy bath in a holy river, I think all those fishes and tortoises who are living in the water have no more sins, because every day they wash away their sins! And this is the way how the Buddha tried to ridicule these kinds of religious beliefs.

Again, Brahmins were regarded as high caste in the priests and all the others are belonging to low caste, even the Buddha who was born in Sakya caste, also lower according to them. Brahmins have written books against Buddhism. What they say? The Teaching of the Buddha is very good, but unfortunately, we cannot take because he was not born in a Brahmin family. You see, it is like this. The Teaching of the Buddha is just like pure milk, but the container is just like dog skin so we cannot take this milk. See how they ridicule the Buddha's station because of the caste system.

The Buddha had a very big battle to wipe out, eradicate caste discrimination. The Buddha was criticised and condemned for giving due place, equal rights, to the labourers, coolies, low caste people. To practise their religion without any discrimination. Ordaining them as Monks, then allow kings and ministers to come and pay respect to reduce their pride. First time in the history a religious Teacher has done this.

Again, at that time poor ladies were not given freedom to practise any religion. Strictly prohibited to enter into any place of worship. They are not allowed to recite any holy books or any mantra in their religion. They say they are very impure. When this situation was going on, the Buddha, first time in the human history, gave full freedom for women to practise a religion, Buddhism, without any discrimination; and this freedom we still enjoy.

In certain religions, when they attend to their religious services, men and women cannot sit down together. Must separate. Now here we are enjoying freedom. No discrimination. So, when you study the historical background, you can understand what Buddhism has done to mankind before all these religions come into existence. Although they come and tell us that we are worshipping devils, when you study all those existing sixty-two religions in India at that time, you can see what sort of belief they had.

A religious Teacher who introduced his own Teachings had his own followers. He had recorded everything in his holy book, and followers were given advice not to do anything without referring to their holy book. Strictly observe the holy book. What happened? One day when the Teacher was crossing a river with his followers, a very narrow bridge, the Teacher fell into the river. And the followers were carrying their holy book. And the Teacher was shouting there; please save me, save me, but they were referring to their holy book to find out whether the Teacher had written in his holy book when he fell into the river to release him. It was not in the book, cannot do anything. This is the nature of religions at that time my dear friends. Even today, there are a few.

When scientists discover many things for the benefit of mankind to release

their suffering, some religious groups say, 'oh we cannot accept because it is not in our holy book'. Very unfortunate. That is what the Buddha said. Don't become slaves to your holy book. Even Buddha's book. I'll tell you later why Buddhism.

Whether you can find this freedom in any other religion, he says, don't accept my Teaching, thinking the Buddha is a great man. He is an enlightened religious Teacher, wonderful wisdom. He can perform miracles, he can cure sickness, therefore we must follow him. He said do not accept my Teaching, thinking I am a great man. What will happen; you will depend on that person, never understand the truth. That is the danger. You maintain belief and faith, never realise the Truth.

The second advice is: don't depend on your holy book. Always people say, oh, our holy book says like this, therefore we must accept.

The Buddha has given us four chances to understand the truth. Unfortunately, people don't use this. He says if you cannot understand any particular subject of the Dhamma, what do you have to do without listening to the public? Because I know your nature. Always you say whenever you want to find out something in Buddhism, you say, people say like this, you know only that much. Never listen to the public. But how many Buddhists are there who can tell 'the Buddha says like this in Dhammapada, in Anguttara Nikaya, or in Sutta Pitaka, or in Vinaya Pitaka'. How many Buddhists are there?

But others can say, 'Bible says like this, Koran says like this'. They can do that, but Buddhists say, 'people say like this'. After listening to all these cock-and-bull stories from old ladies and all the others, they come and say, 'People say we cannot do this'. That is your Buddhism. That is why the Buddha says don't accept anything in this world thinking the majority here in this world believe this. That system is good for democratic government to get vote, not for religion. Why? The Buddha says majority here in this world are fools. Very few people are intelligent. It is true. Then if you are going to listen to the majority, you also become fools. Think. Allow your minds, give a chance for your mind to think without depending on the Teacher, without depending on your holy book, without depending on the public.

But still I did not explain the four methods introduced by the Buddha. He said if you can understand, you must refer to your religious book. That means the basic Teaching. People have written all sorts of rubbish in the name of this religion, in different schools of Buddhism. Please don't depend on different schools of Buddhism; they have distorted, misinterpreted, misguided, misled people. Whether it is Theravada or Mahayana or whatever yana, or this yana or that yana, you can throw away all this rubbish! Try to find out what the Buddha taught.

Books are available. Alright. If after reading you find out it is difficult to understand, then what to do now. You cannot agree. Then the Buddha says there are books written as commentaries and sub-commentaries to explain the real meaning, the definition, the root, the significance of this particular

issue. Take for instance now you want to know the real meaning of the Dhamma. What is Dhamma? What is Dhamma, you are not sure. Then you read a certain sutta, still you cannot understand. Then you refer to the commentary.

In the commentary you can see the definition. What is the definition? Definition is this word. Beautiful interpretation. Meaning of Dhamma. The Buddha did not introduce a religion. When you define, analyse the meaning of this word 'religion', you can understand. Actually, it is not a religion, it is the Dhamma. When you realise the meaning of this word you know how to value it.

What is it? Four kinds of unfortunate states of existence where living beings suffer. In the hells, animal kingdom, ghosts or spirit world. Then various kinds of spirits - there are four groups: hell, animal kingdom, spirit world, ghosts. Four unfortunate states. The method that we practise to avoid, to escape from these four unfortunate states of existence without allowing us to fall down, get into any of these unfortunate states of existence after our death; the method introduced by the Buddha; is called Dhamma. See if it is meaningful or not.

So Dhamma does not mean praying and worshipping to Buddha, burning your sticks and burning papers, reciting mantra and suttas. Dhamma. A method for you to practise, if you don't like to suffer. Not only that, to get rid of this wheel of existence, repeated birth and death. We come into existence, changes take place, then again start to decay; after decaying and decaying we collapse; after that disintegrate, disappear. That is what we are doing life after life.

So in between we are going on fighting and quarrelling and killing and bluffing and stealing and cheating, doing all the bad things; very seldom we get the chance to do a little bit of good. To get rid of all these unfortunate states of existence, unsatisfactoriness, suffering, physically and mentally, the method introduced by the Buddha is called Dhamma. This interpretation you can see in the commentary. Otherwise, you do not know the meaning of Dhamma.