

BUDDHISM AS I UNDERSTOOD*

-Tsewang Tamding

Buddhism is a strange religion. It is a religion that is complicated as well as simple. For those who have both intelligence and patience to study the deeper side of it, this is an extremely complicated religion. Yet for others who have neither intelligence nor patience is this a simple religion. I belong to the second category.

First of all why am I a Buddhist? This is because Lord Buddha said that one must not accept his Dharma blindly without testing it thoroughly to see whether it suits one's way of life or not. He said that one must judge his teachings from every angle as if you were buying gold, testing it by burning, cutting and rubbing. So, looking from any point of view, for me this religion suits my way of life the best.

For me Buddhism is a very simple form of religion to practise, because to be a good Buddhist it is enough to be a good person. It is a religion that polishes your mind. Buddhism demands your mind to be pure and honest. That is the essence of this religion and for this there is no need for you or me to shave our heads or to meditate in a cave. Things like the blowing of trumpets or the wearing of red clothes are the means and not the end. For me I understand that I can still be a good Buddhist while playing with my children.

Buddhism is a religion of compassion. Buddhism never teaches hatred between people because for a true Buddhist not only the people but all sentient beings are like our own mother because we are constantly in the cycle of countless rebirth during which time each of us might have become the other's mother. The best Buddhist must always sacrifice everything for the benefit of the others, while a good Buddhist must not try to harm others even if he cannot help them. This is what the world is most in need of today and I think that as Buddhists it is not beyond our capacity to practise such an attitude.

The world is in crisis today. The question of world peace is melting like ice exposed to the sun. This is because of the fact that there are people in the world today who believe that power comes out of the barrel of a gun. But contrary to this, Buddhism as I understood thinks otherwise. A Buddhist starts his every day prayer by wishing "I seek refuge in the Buddha. I seek refuge in the Dharma. I seek refuge in the Sangha. For the benefit of all motherly beings may I be able to attain Buddhahood. May there be happiness along with the causes of happiness for all sentient beings and may all sentient beings be free from the miseries along with the causes of the miseries. May all sentient beings be free from such feeling such as injustice and jealousy and may all live happily in harmony". This is what a Buddhist feels towards his fellow beings and by having such an attitude I do not think that there is any need for a person to extract power out of the barrel of a gun.

One point by which I am fascinated is that the Buddha said "the best among all the wealth is the wealth of contentment". It is the question of satisfaction and dissatisfaction that makes a lot of difference in the way of man's thinking. A Buddhist

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believes that contentment is a very important thing because a king without satisfaction is a poor as a beggar and a beggar with contentment is as rich as a king. When there is no contentment there is greed and greed could be a cause of one's own misery as well as the miseries of others. For me as a true Buddhist I can practise this feeling without meditating in a retreat centre

Buddhist teaches about the Law of Karma. What is Karma? It is nothing but the law of cause and effect. To be a true Buddhist there is no need for any one to read all the books of kagyur or Tangyur to understand. You can't sow a poison seed and expect a medicinal fruit. You can get only poison fruit and nothing else. But if have sown a medicinal seed you can expect the fruit of that and nothing else. You shout in an empty hall and say, "I love you". It will at once echo back, "love you". On the other hand if you shout, "I hate you". The echo will shout back the same thing without change. This is the law of karma. Let's not talk about the fruit of this life's good or bad deeds in next life. But let us take the example of an innocent little child of a neighbour. If you tell him stories and give him sweets every day the child will love you. But this same child will hate you and throw stones at you if you scold and beat him whenever you meet him. This is nothing but a simple example of law of karma in practise. So, even the law of karma is not something which is beyond the capacity of a common man's practise.

A very famous teaching of the Buddha is His Four Noble Truths. They are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of cessation from the sufferings and the truth of the path. These are complicated teachings if we go in detail. But for a simple Buddhist like me I can still try to understand it in a simple way. The world is full of miseries which we cannot tolerate any more. There cannot be any suffering without a definite cause and we are strongly desirous of getting free from these miseries. So to get ourselves free from these miseries or sufferings, we have the path in the form of the teachings of the Buddha. There is no need for us to go deep into the lines of thick volumes or religious scriptures and lose ourselves in them. We can simply practise these teachings through our daily life experience. There is no use in taking a peg of whisky when you are suffering from a severe headache. It is also true that there is a cause for that headache. It is true that you want to get rid of the headache, and it is also true that there is a path to cure this headache through the medium of medicine. So, the first thing we have to do is to see what is the cause of this headache. Say there is a tumour and by removing this tumour through the path of operation you are free from that suffering. In this way we can analyse and remove every cause of the miseries of our life. In other words, if you are not happy because your neighbour has just bought a new Maruti car then at once try to understand the cause of this unhappiness. To remove this suffering out of your mind look at your less fortunate neighbours who have nothing else in their possession and feel yourself happy because compared to them you are a fortunate person to possess a serviceable scooter.

Thus, judging from these points of view, I understand that Buddhism is not only logical but also a practical religion which does not believe in an external creator. It is a noble religion because it teaches that for every being and for this they must practise

the feeling of love and sacrifice for the benefit of all the sentient beings. You must make your own path and others are nothing but just the guides. It is a religion very deep and vast like an ocean which cannot possibly be fully explored within a life time even for those who study it seriously. And yet, for a simple person like me it is a religion very much down to the earth in which without even going to a monastery by taking a rosary in my hand, I can still practise because what I required to be a true Buddhist is nothing but a pure heart.

Finally, by the royalty of virtues I have earned out of writing this article, may there be peace and happiness for all sentient beings living in this world.