

Features

Attachment to practices, rites and rituals

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Siddhartha Gautama was a Prince in ancient India (563 BC to 483 BC). He hailed from an aristocratic family of the Sakya clan. He was the son of the King of the kingdom of the Sakyas - which was on the borders of present-day Nepal and India.

After his death, he came to be known as Gautama Buddha - the Enlightened One! He renounced his royal position to seek the truth about suffering that taints life. As an ardent spiritual ascetic, he experienced 'enlightenment' and by preaching the path to enlightenment he founded Buddhism in India in the 6th-5th centuries BCE.

He lived a princely life of unbridled palatial luxury! When he was 29 years old, when he was quite matured and curious, fortuitous circumstances made him encounter the vagaries of life such as sickness, old age, decay and death. While contemplating on such vagaries, he found suffering lurking behind sickness, aging and decay. It unsettled him. It was disturbing and mystifying to him! He realised that he too, with passing age, would undergo the same metamorphosis - with suffering as an inevitable consequence!

Unlike any other, who would meekly allow old age, decay and death tainted with suffering to unfold as an inevitable process of life that is destined to happen to every man and animal, he was firm in his conviction that there should be a way out of such a metamorphosis. He soon became disenchanted with a palatial life of gross, material enjoyment - which he realised had all these years masked the truth about inevitable sickness, old age, decay and death and the suffering that comes with it!

Realisation

This sudden realisation troubled him and he made the great decision to desert the royal palace which also meant sacrificing the opportunity of becoming a King of a kingdom - because, he was the heir to the throne, and instead to become an ascetic in search of the spiritual truth leading to the cessation of suffering. This was a monumental decision that culminated in the revelation of the highest of spiritual doctrines to mankind!

He went through extreme self-mortification and austerity in the belief it would help him find the truth behind suffering. It only resulted in severe physical emaciation and deterioration of mental faculties.

He realised that self-mortification and austerity, which deeply involved the mind and body (namarupa) that projected a false personality (the ego - *atta*) was not the way. Instead, he sat under a Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya in India to meditate on mindfulness, on in and out breathing (anapanasati).

When he finally succeeded in purging his 'gross' mind of all defilements, of all borrowed knowledge, of a dead past, of all thought-clutter, his mind became silent and empty. He was in a state of a subtle 'no-mind'.....free of all mental barriers.....free of all three dimensional human logic and intellectual reasoning!

Thus, with an uncluttered, silent, no-mind, receptive to wisdom divine, his insight soared to great heights as he had no mental barriers. He experienced enlightenment (nirvana) and perceived the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*) and came to be called the Enlightened One (Samma Sambuddha).

The Buddha also experienced the wisdom behind rebirth and the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*). The Buddha discovered that human beings have been enmeshed in a continuous cycle of birth and death for an incredible length of time.

Ten Impediments

More importantly, he also discovered that there were Ten Impediments (*Dasa Samyojanas*) that prevent a human being from escaping from the clutches of *Samsara* (*Dasa Samyojana sutta - Anguttara Nikaya*).

One can overcome the Ten Impediments only by 'insight' (*vipassana*). The Buddha gave a very compelling message to his disciples: 'Appo deepo bhava' - 'Be a light unto yourself' (to be 'insightful' and not to depend on borrowed knowledge such as scriptures nor on knowledge related to practices, rites and rituals - as these cannot help one to overcome the Ten Impediments).

Borrowed knowledge is only an accumulation of memories encapsulated by blind belief, logic and intellectual reasoning which belongs to the realm of a fickle mind. On the other hand, wisdom stemming from insight belongs to the realm of the divine!

With insight a mind becomes free of distortion (*vipallasa*). One will then experience the essence of universal



traits. One experiences *Yatha Bhuta Nana Dassana* (the perception of things as they really are - according to reality).

This is a prelude to realising the truth behind the great delusion of *tilakkhana* - impermanence (*aniccā*), non-self (*anattā*) and suffering (*dukkha*). It is this supreme realisation that finally frees one from suffering - that which taints a person's life as one goes through sickness, old age, decay and death! One no more will wallow in the mire of *Samsara*!

The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path (*Arya Ashtangika Marga*) provides the paths for one's mind to be free of distortion through insight! Thus, with insight one would then no more be caught in the grip of *Samsara*. One would then be on the path towards realising liberation and enlightenment. One would then, with time, discover one's already enlightened state!

Of the Ten Impediments, there is one major Impediment one has to overcome with 'insight'. It traps one into believing that what one does is right. It deprives one from evolving into higher states of spirituality! One is shackled to this Impediment - not being aware that one's belief in what one does so reverently is never going to help one in the quest for liberation and enlightenment.

It is disheartening to witness millions upon millions the world over being enslaved to this Impediment and being fettered to it with blind belief, never realising that their efforts in seeking liberation is counter-productive and only creates a great Impediment.

It is the Impediment of *Silabbata Paramasa*. This Impediment refers to attachment to rites and rituals (*silabbatupadana*) and to any practice with the belief it will result in liberation and enlightenment.

Even if the practice of the five precepts (*pancha sila*) or any higher practice is done with the belief that it will result in liberation and enlightenment, it will be an Impediment coming under the category *Silabbata Paramasa*.

The Fourth Noble Truth categorically states that the path leading to the cessation of suffering, the principles for attaining emancipation, is the Noble Eight-fold Path (*Arya Ashtangika Marga*). Adoption of any other practice, rites and rituals in the belief it will lead to final liberation and enlightenment will act as an Impediment.

To attain the first stage of Stream-enterer (*Sotapanna*) - the first of four stages of Awakening - where one steps on the glorious path leading to final emancipation, three Impediments must be overcome.

Firstly, the Impediment of *Sakkāya ditthi* - delusion of Self - this is mine (craving) - this I am (conceit) - this is myself (wrong view), the wrong notion about a fixed ego oriented personality (*self/atta*) that cannot change.

Secondly, The Impediment of *Vicikicca* - relating to doubts entertained about the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, the *Sangha*, the Eightfold Path (*Arya Ashtangika Marga*).

Thirdly, the Impediment of *Silabbata Paramasa* - attachment to rites and rituals (*silabbatupadana*) and to any practice with the belief it will result in liberation and enlightenment.

Sotapanna

Once one becomes a *Sotapanna* (Stream-enterer), thereafter, one progresses to a *Sakadāgāmin* (Once-

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returner), then to the state of an *Anāgāmin* (Non-returner) and finally to the state of an *Arahant* where one discovers one's already enlightened state! One is not trapped in *Samsara* anymore!

Even if *Sakkaya Ditthi* and *Vicikicca* are overcome, unless the Impediment of *Silabbata Paramasa* is overcome, one can never be a *Sotapanna* (Stream-enterer). One is then subject to *Samsara*!

Attachment to practices, rites and rituals in the blind belief that those are ways to achieve liberation (*silabbatupadana*) is one of four types of clinging (*upadana*) in Dependent Origination (*paticca samuppada*). It inevitably leads to suffering and repetitive births in *Samsara*.

Attachment to practices, rites and rituals in the belief that liberation, enlightenment can be attained is rife among the Buddhist population worldwide. The masses conveniently ignore or, are in ignorance of the fact that the *Arya Ashtangika Marga* is the only way to attain liberation, to discover enlightenment, to be emancipated!

Buddhism has sadly taken the form of a mere ritualistic religion with prominence given to worshipping an 'unresponsive' Buddha statue (made of inert material) and performance of practices, rites and rituals! The fragrance of the *Dhamma* is receding. Most of the Buddhists do not make the attempt to comprehend the deeper implications of a supremely sublime doctrine.

Rites and rituals

They are more comfortable performing duty bound practices, rites and rituals in robotic fashion; in the blind belief such performances would lead them to liberation. Unfortunately, it is so distressing and disturbing to see even the literate, intellectual masses with the same mindset!

In every Buddhist house and in every temple, practices, rites and rituals before a 'non-responsive' Buddha statue, with lit lamps and joss sticks, around which lay withering, pretty flowers brutally torn off plants are performed perfunctorily on a daily basis.

It is truly mind boggling to witness intelligent people (leave alone the illiterates) slavishly worshipping a figure churned out by a factory made out of a lump of clay, cement, metal, plastic or wood. It is truly a very pathetic sight as it reflects the degree of ignorance (*avidya*) such people are steeped in!

It is surmised by the masses that such perfunctory performances are performed to please the Buddha. They are so enmeshed in ignorance that they do not realise that the Buddha is beyond being pleased as the Buddha is an egoless entity who has transcended the dualistic nature of being pleased and being displeased!

Similarly, it is also surmised that by performing such practices, rites and rituals one pays respect to the Bud-

dha. Once again, there is no Buddha to receive such respect as the Buddha is an egoless entity who has transcended the dualistic nature of respect and disrespect.

Practices, rites and rituals thus performed with blind faith that these would please the Buddha and who will also acknowledge the respect paid to him and would lead one towards liberation, enlightenment pose as an insurmountable Impediment. It stultifies one's progress on the spiritual path. Such people will be entrapped in *Silabbata Paramasa*, subject to inexorable *Samsara*!

Blind belief

Owing to one's ignorance steeped in blind belief, one is denied the evolution to higher states of contemplation and realisation. This important aspect of Buddhism is being ignored by the masses because the masses have not been educated on the lines of being free from the clutches of *Silabbata Paramasa*.

One can never attain or seek liberation by perfunctory practices, rites and rituals as one is already an enlightened Being waiting to be discovered only by insight. One is not aware that one is already enlightened owing to delusion/ignorance which traps one in a world governed by greed (lust, desire) and hatred (any negative, inhuman traits) - giving rise to the invidious triumvirate of Greed/Hatred/Delusion (*Loba, Dosa, Moha*)!

Only deep insight will unshackle one to enable one to discover one's already enlightened state. This insight is possible if one pays heed to the Buddha who said: *Appo deepo bhava* - 'Be a light unto yourself'!

It is the path of insight resorted to by the Buddha - not borrowed knowledge and practices nor rites and rituals performed robotically in parrot fashion - that will open the mind to faculties hitherto unknown - to take one to the realms of undiluted wisdom divine!

It is such wisdom that enables one to discover one's already enlightened state, which lies smothered by layers of greed, hatred and delusion/ignorance from which states arises sordid traits being below the normal standards of human decency and dignity, devoid of noble quality of mind or spirit - as a consequence to non-adherence to *Sabba Papassa Akaranam* (Discard all that is immoral, what should not be done - *Dhammapada:183*).

Robotic lifestyles

It appears that the greater part of a modern population, facing trying and challenging modern-day robotic lifestyles and stressful circumstances are impelled to indulge in non-virtuous thoughts/actions on non-altruistic lines for personal benefit with no thought about 'spiritual consequences'. They are certainly not into: *Sabba*

Papassa Akaranam (a way that leads to the purification of the mind - an essential pre-requisite for emancipation!)

As most people are subconsciously inclined towards worship, the reason why there are many religions and gods and idols and places of worship galore, one is compelled to think it is better to worship the Buddha and perform some practices and rites and rituals. It is simply acts of self-deception, of self-appeasement!

They rejoice in the 'external' skin and flesh of a fruit instead of pondering over the 'internal' seed - wherein lies the emancipation they seek! They are trapped in *Silabbata Paramasa*!

One must breathe in the redolence of the *dhamma* and seek refuge in it, practice *Sabba Papassa Akaranam*, comprehend the Four Noble Truths and set foot on the Noble Eightfold Path - instead of resorting to routine, duty-bound robotic, parrot-like performance of practices, rites and rituals in the blind belief it will lead to liberation!

'Monks, be islands unto yourselves, be your own refuge, having no other; let the *dhamma* be an island and a refuge to you, having no other' - *Attadhipaa Sutta*

Buddha said: "Ananda, whatever bhikkhu or bhikkhuni, layman or laywoman, abides by the *Dhamma*, lives uprightly in the *Dhamma*, walks in the way of the *Dhamma*, it is by such a one that the *Tathagata* is respected, venerated, esteemed, worshipped, and honoured in the highest degree".

He also said: 'The Highest gift of all gifts is the gift of *Dhamma*'.

Dhamma

The Buddha thus makes no mention of worshipping his form made out of mere materials such as clay or plastics and to perform robotic practices, rites and rituals.

The Buddha has given priority to the *Dhamma* and not to himself.....'Yo dhammam passathi, so mang passathif- Seeing the Buddha through *dhamma*' - (*Vakkali Sutta*). The Buddha said: 'Let the *Dhamma* and the discipline that I have taught you be your teacher'. Clearly there is no mention of practices, rites and rituals!

Sadly, the *Dhamma* has receded into insignificance with the statue of the Buddha and rites and rituals being given prominence by the masses, as a result of enslavement to self-deception and self-appeasement - trapped in *Silabbata Paramasa*!

The historical *Shakyamuni* Buddha never advocated worshipping him. He advocated leading an ethical, harmless life guided by '*Sabba Papassa Akaranam*' and to understand the Four Noble Truths, that would make one tread the path to enlightenment, the Noble Eightfold Noble (*Arya Ashtangika Marga*).

Adherence to '*Sabba Papassa Akaranam*' enables one to restrain insalubrious thoughts arising from a mind governed by arid logic and ambiguous reasoning which, goaded by the ego, may lead to action causing mental or physical harm to another.

With the mind restrained, one provides the opportunity for the heart to bloom and spread the fragrance of *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *muditha* (sympathetic joy). One then attains a state of equanimity (*upekkha*).

These attributes constitute the ideal way of conduct when inter-acting with man and animal (*sattesu samma*

patipatti). These attributes are with reverence known as *Brahma-viharas* - *brahma*-like divine attributes!

These are also known as the Boundless States (*appamanna*). When one is in this state, one is impartial, not subjected to prejudices and not judgmental. Such a mind is incapable of cultivating religious, racial or class hatred and only benevolence will flow from such a mind to man or animal!

The understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the diligent practice of *Sabba Papassa Akaranam* will propel one to the first rung of the Noble Eightfold Path - *Samma ditthi* - the journey to emancipation has then begun!

But alas, what do we see? One sees small, plastic Buddha statues 'egoistically' displayed on the dashboards of vehicles, of pictures of the Buddha surrounded with blinking lights in buses or statues of various sizes adorning various corners of an office or house often with joss sticks (as if joss sticks are an important ingredient in the recipe called 'nirvana') or shrine rooms in houses with a statue on a pedestal where parrot-fashion incantations in *Pali* are recited (without knowing the meaning) and robotic rites and rituals are performed for self-appeasement, the gems of wisdom of the *Dhamma* are overlooked, no effort is taken to evolve into the state of *samma ditthi* - the first rung of the *Arya Ashtangika Marga*!

What has Buddhism come to? What is the use of the voluminous *Tripitaka* or of the sublime *Abhidhamma*? Is it only reserved for the monks to recite by rote on occasions in a language the masses do not understand - often in street corners with loud speakers causing noise pollution?

The man on the street will not become spiritual - instead one gets irritated by the invasion of a relentless, monotonous noise by the loudspeaker! Instead of calming someone, the noise disturbs one's calmness.

Samma Ditthi

When will anyone ever reach the state of *Samma Ditthi* (Right Understanding) when, in the first place one's understanding of the Buddha and *Dhamma* are so skewed? Without setting foot on *Samma Ditthi*, how can one tread the glorious path that leads to the cessation of suffering?

The *Samyutta Nikaya* speaks of an incident:

'*Sāmandaka* asks Sariputra about Nirvana Sariputra said: *Rāgakhayo* (destruction of greed) *Dosakhayo* (destruction of hatred) *Mohakhayo* (destruction of delusion/ignorance)'

One then discovers one's innate state of nirvana (the already enlightened Being), within oneself, waiting to be discovered!

Greed, hatred and delusion/ignorance (*loba/dosha/moha*) cannot be destroyed by practices, rites and rituals prodded by blind belief that it would lead to emancipation!

The Eightfold Path does not speak about the performances of rites and rituals. Therefore, rites and rituals are irrelevant to liberation from rebirths. When one harbours a desire for rites, rituals, rules or vows, one is then bound by the third Impediment *Silabbata Paramasa*.

One of the translations of *Silabbata Paramasa* is 'attachment to rites and rituals. Rites and rituals are irrelevant to liberation from rebirths.'

A spiritual life is lived as per the *Dhamma*, by the annihilation of desires with no grasping. Adherence to blind practices, rites and rituals tantamount to grasping that traps one in *Samsara*.

Kāyagantha means bodily tie - binding one to *Samsāra*. There are four *Kāyaganthas* and the third refers to the bodily tie of clinging to rules and rituals or wrong practice (*Silabbata Paramasa*).

One must strive to earnestly understand the truth behind the Four Noble Truths. When one is in consonance with the Third Noble Truth it can be said that one has complete understanding of the nature of phenomena, of suffering!

Nirvana is the 'experience' of an innate state that is always ever-present birth after birth. It is an inherent part of human nature. It is not something to be sought 'outside' of oneself by performing practices, rites and rituals. It is to be sought by insight (*Appo deepo bhava*) - 'Be a light unto yourself'.

This way, one will experience its fragrance when the smothering layers of ignorance are peeled away by the gradual cessation of *avidya* (spiritual ignorance).

Buddha refers to people who are at one of the four stages of awakening as *Ariya-Puggala* (Noble People). With the current chaotic mind-set of tension-ridden, goal-oriented, robotic people driven by utter selfishness and with lopsided beliefs and priorities, *Arya Puggalas* will indeed be a rarity!