

Satsang

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SAPTA SHLOKI (The Seven Verses)

Verse 4: आर्षग्रंथेषु सर्वेषु श्रुतिप्रामाण्यमेव च ।
सर्वतः सारमादद्यात् निजकल्याणहेतवे ॥

Arsha grantheshu sarveshu
Shruti pramanya mewacha
Sarvatah saramadadyat
Nijakalyanahetawe

Purport: Of all the literature given through the seers, Vedas is the standard reference. Extract the essence for thy benefit.

Commentary on Verse 4 (Continued)

...By Vasant

Review of World Religious Systems

Buddhism

When the Eternal Principles of happy life given in the beginning through the Vedas are trampled down on a large scale, a Divine Messenger appears on earth to set things right. Thus, came Buddha, the Blessed One, to re-establish the same message.

When a great Divine Messenger, an Avatar, is born, the mother is told prior to the birth of the child about the event. The parents are also informed at the time of birth and the same thing is announced after birth. This tradition was scrupulously followed in the case of Gautama who later on was known as Buddha. Buddha was born at Kapilavastu in North India in 560 B.C. Buddha was born on the full moon day of Vaishakh (a month in the lunar calendar). Buddha attained Bodhi on the full moon day of yet another Vaishakh and he entered Mahanirvana (literally, the great liberation) on the full moon day of yet another Vaishakh.

Prince Gautama was brought up in the beautiful surroundings of the Himalayas and his father Shuddhodana took great care to see that the prince was reared up among happy companions. Gautama married the beautiful Yashodhara. A son was born and was named Rahul. Buddha was about thirty years old then. He left his beautiful wife, the newly born son and the kingdom that was his and became a wandering monk,

spending his days in prayer, meditation and hard Hatha Yoga practices.

Buddha literally means enlightened. Bodhi means light. The tree under which Gautama was meditating and received Bodhi came to be known as Bodhi tree. Gautama became Buddha, the Illumined One, the Blessed One. Buddha gave only one sermon and it was given soon after Bodhi. It was at Saranath, Benaras. He declared that freedom from the bondage of Karma is liberation. This he termed NIRVANA.

One year after the Maha Nirvana of Buddha, his disciples held the first Bodhi Sabha (Council of the Wise) to collate the teachings of the Blessed One. Buddha spoke to the person considering his ability to understand and his stage of growth. Hence, various apparently conflicting opinions were expressed. The conclusions were orally transmitted as the teachings of the Master till about One Century B.C. They were then reduced to writing and came to be known as TRIPITAKA (The Three Baskets). The language used was Pali.

1. Vinayapitaka: Rules for the conduct of the monks.
2. Suttapitaka: Conversations of the Blessed One about spiritual practices which culminate into Nirvana (liberation).
3. Abhidhammapitaka: Doctrines preached by the Blessed One.

If anyone approached Buddha with metaphysical questions merely to satisfy his idle curiosity, the Master refused to oblige him as it would serve no purpose. He explained that some questions could not be answered merely in terms of logic as enlightened intellect alone could grasp it. He thus followed the methods of the Vedic seers who held that truth has to be experienced and not expressed. One has to transcend the mind to grasp it. He replied to the questioner considering his ability to understand. When someone asked whether God exists, the Master replied,

"God exists; not that God exists.

God does not exist; not that God does not exist."

The above may be compared to the following quotations from the Bible:

"No one has seen God anytime." (John)

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." (Mathew)

All this closely follows the Upanishadic tradition of reflecting on such matters.

Yajnya, the ancient process of purification of the atmosphere through the agency of fire which leads to unburdening the mind was perverted by the practice of offering animals to fire. This resulted in vitiating the atmosphere instead of purifying the same. Buddha came to stop this evil practice. His work was twofold: to stop such evil Yajnyas and to resuscitate the original Yajnyas in their pure form.

Buddha laid great stress on Karma, i.e. right action without attachment to the fruit thereof. He stressed that every human had the intrinsic capacity to work out his own salvation. Strictly speaking, this does not conflict with the doctrine of Grace stated by Jesus or mentioned in the Upanishads. When we say that one must reap as one sows, we admit that one is the maker of his fate as stated in the Bhagavadgeeta. Buddha stated the same doctrine. Once the purificatory process is set in, Divine Grace manifests.

Good Karma without attachment redeems the mind from the grip of desires and craving for sensations. Yajnya purifies the atmosphere and thus the PRANA and the mind. Yajnya therefore is a great material aid to make the mind tranquil.

"The righteous never attend Yajnyas wherein the goat, sheep, cow and other animals are slaughtered as offerings to fire. The righteous attend Yajnyas wherein the sheep, cow and other animals are not slaughtered and which are approved by the people. The wise should perform Yajnyas as it is highly rewarding; it blesses the Yajaman (performer of Yajnya). Such a Yajnya adds to prosperity and the Devatas are pleased."

(Samyutta Nikaya 1-76)

Buddha enunciated the four noble truths:

1. The Noble Truth that the world is full of misery.

Birth, death, growth is all misery. To be bound to the object of attachment is misery. To be separated from that object is also misery. Fulfilled desire leads to more desires. Thwarted desire leads to wrath and hence suffering.

2. The Noble Truth of the cause of suffering.

Craving for things and persons causes suffering.

3. The Noble Truth that this suffering can cease.

Buddha stated that complete annihilation of this TANHA (craving for the gratification of desires) is possible by right efforts.

4. The Noble Truth that the effort consists of the Eightfold Path.

Right Understanding
Right Aspiration
Right Speech
Right Action
Right Livelihood
Right Attempt
Right Recollectedness
Right Meditation

A closer scrutiny of the Path will bear out the fact that all the steps lead to the annihilation of craving for desires. The First Noble Truth states that all existence is bound up with suffering and hence the goal is to get rid of this suffering.

"With ignorance passions arise. When ignorance disappears passions cease." (Majjima Nikaya)

"What is the root of all evil? Craving. What is the root of good? To be free from craving." (Majjima Nikaya)

Buddha manifested in the world when the intelligentia was busy giving dry discourses in philosophy which they termed as religion. What people needed was a practical enunciation and a programme. Buddha gave them both. He preached morality not as an end in itself, but as inevitable means to achieve an end. The end was freedom from desires. Desire leads to rebirth and hence freedom from desire means freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Purification of mind is the preliminary thing to enable us to practice the Path. The Path is to be practiced in every walk of life.

"To practice virtue, to shun vice, to purify the mind, this is the religion of the Buddhas." (Dhammapada)

"What are the signs of true religion? Love, goodwill, truthfulness, purity, nobility and goodness." (From stone inscription of Buddhist Emperor Asoka)

"Beautiful speech does not make a man wise. He who is peaceful, free from fear, is truly wise." (Dhammapada)

"Avoid evil in thought, word or deed. Then thou attaineth to the path of the Holy." (Dhammapada)

"There is no place on earth, sky, sea or the mountain where an evil deed does not bring grief to the doer." (Udanavagga)

The Noble Eightfold Path is an exercise in moral living culminating in mind culture. Constant vigilance is the watchword. Mind culture means reducing anger, greed, envy, temptation, lust and pride. All this is TAPA of the Fivefold Path of Vedas.

AGNIHOTRA, the process of purification of the atmosphere through the agency of fire which leads to purification of the mind is a great material aid to mind culture. DAAN (sharing your assets in a spirit of humility) is a great material aid to reduce your attachment to worldly objects. TAPA is mind culture. KARMA (performance of good action without attachment to the fruit of action) reduces further the burden on the mind. SWADHYAYA (Self-study) is the search of "Who am I" which leads to Nirvana. This is the Fivefold Path of Vedas. This is Eternal Religion (Satya Dharma). Buddha came to re-establish the same when people misbehaved.

Yajnya, the process of purification of the atmosphere which leads to the unburdening of the mind from the grip of desires is a great material aid to enable us to observe any spiritual discipline. The agency for purification of the atmosphere was fire. When people started putting flesh and blood into fire instead of the prescribed materials, the effect on the atmosphere was exactly the opposite. Flesh and blood offerings to fire were rampant prior to Buddha's appearance on the scene. The priestly class held a firm sway over the masses, although the priest was devoid of learning. Ritualism had taken a heavy toll of religion and the consequent impurities in the atmosphere worked out their inevitable effect. Asceticism and self mortification on one side and life given to worldly pleasures irrespective of misery and grief caused to others on the other side was the deplorable picture that society presented prior to the arrival of Buddha. Buddha showed them the Golden Mean.

Priestly hypocrisy, casteism, sorcery, lack of cogent thinking, fatalism, overlordship, lapse of moral code, refuge behind high sounding doctrines as a cover for craftiness was the order of the day. Reason was scoffed at and dogma ruled roost. External of religion seemed more important than essentials. Slaughter of animals in Yajnyas was the common practice.

An antithesis was necessary to bring about the synthesis. Buddha did this.

He never offered to expiate the sins of others. Only self-help would lead to Nirvana (liberation). He gave utmost freedom of thought to his disciples. He asked people not to aspire for heaven but to seek haven in ethical conduct and self conquest. He forbade exhibition of miracles and signs as they might produce a dent in the reasoning process and lead to blind following.

Buddha advocated MAITRI, the perfection in loving kindness. Instead of an independent supernatural, he insisted on a recognisable reality of attitudes and ideals. He never discussed with anyone profundity of knowledge if he felt it was of no practical use to the inquirer.

His mission was to deal a blow to flesh offerings in Yajnya, to resuscitate Yajnyas performed in the prescribed manner, eschewing violence or offerings of flesh and blood, to arouse people to their innate capacity to reason and sublimate intellect to right action, to pierce the shield of hypocrisy of the priestly class, to throw doubts in the armour of faith because it was on the wrong shoulders. This was the antithesis presented by him which would ultimately lead to synthesis.

In the Indian tradition, the Avatar of Buddha came to be associated with stopping of Yajnyas involving violence to animals. Buddha's mission in India is described as "DAITYANAM WIMOHANAYA" (to lure away the devils from the performance of debased form of Yajnyas) and to resuscitate Yajnyas performed strictly according to Vedic injunctions.

When Buddha's message traveled beyond the frontiers of India to places with no background of violent Yajnyas, it fulfilled the other aspect. GOMA (HOMA in Sanskrit), the holy fire invocation was in great vogue during Tang Dynasty (618-906 A. D.) and it was first introduced in Japan by the founders of Tendai sect and Shingon sect about twelve hundred years ago. Even to this day we witness the GOMA ritual at the Naritasan Shintoji Temple in Japan where offerings to fire are given five times a day. The round hearth and instruments for oblation are placed on the altar and specific varieties of wood and other materials are offered to fire. The Sutras prescribing the ritual state that if the body, speech and mind of FUDO, the object of worship, those of the principal master and those of the worshipper are fused into one in the Absolute World, mental purity is achieved. In such a pure and innocent state prayer works wonders. Thus, the Grace aspect of Almighty is indirectly introduced along with the importance of purity. According to this esoteric Buddhist sect, the relation between God and man is in general a problem of the mind. Instead of stressing to change the objective situation, you have to learn to change your attitude to it. Thus, the problem becomes totally internal. In this tradition, the fire symbolizes the highest wisdom (BODHI) and firewood the passions, and one has to aspire for the highest Buddhahood.

Gautama, the aristocrat turned commoner, thought in terms of work-a-day world eschewing the hypothesis of the unknown and unknowable. Faith in the Eternal Religion, DHARMAKAYA, was invoked to deal a

deathblow to the learned ignoramus donning the priestly robes. He raised many questions regarding whence, whither and why and asked the people to contemplate on them instead of leaving the matters to the hands of the priest. The Avatar fulfilled the allotted task.

Such a mode of conveying the message leaves many question marks after the physical presence of the prophet is no more. His method of spreading the message was the outcome of the circumstances which then prevailed.

The reverence paid to the relics of the Blessed One, ablution of his image and the invocation of AMITA by millions of Buddhists appear conflicting with the rationalistic teachings of the Master. Contemplation and analytical thinking is not so easy for the untrained mind, and those who offer incense and flowers to the Buddha purify their thoughts and those who bathe the image of the Master with devotion put strength in their conviction that they have to wash their own sins with good deeds. It is human frailty that unless some sort of Dualism is placed before man he finds it difficult to initiate the process of self-cleansing. Buddhist commentators explain this type of worship in two ways. They say that it is not the image or the relics that is adored. There is no expectation of outflow of Grace from the object worshipped. There is no guidance as a Saviour or a Guru might accord. It is further contended that this type of worship infuses devotion and devotion and worship are two different things. Whichever way we might put it one can see the beginnings of idol worship in this process.

About one hundred years after the passing away of the Blessed One the second Council met where the followers split into two groups. One group wanted some relaxation in the monastic vows and were termed progressives. Later there became two groups: MAHAYANA Buddhists (The Great Way) and HINAYANA (The Lower Way). The former gave a devotional and perhaps mystical turn to the teachings of the Master and made them more popular. The MAHAYANA spread to Tibet, China, Korea and Japan while the HINAYANA was confined to Ceylon, Burma and Siam.

Zen Buddhism is a blending of MAHAYANA and Taoism of China in which great stress is laid on meditation. It created some practices which make the mind tranquil.

According to the teachings of Buddha, one has to learn that there is nothing really lacking in us and hence we have to get rid of the hankering after desires.

All prophets, Avatars, Paigambers reiterate the same old message first given through the Vedas. The message is the Eternal Religion. All ask us to purify the mind and purge it of desires. They state the eternal laws and they also lay down certain rules in view of the times they live in. Buddha laid great stress on getting rid of the desire to experience new things. He insisted on doing good Karma under all circumstances. His message was Love.

How to practice the above in the conditions we live in today? This is the problem. The polluted atmosphere has put a great stress on the mind. Even if one decides to be full of Love all the time, the disturbance to the mind from this factor makes things difficult for him. Hence, AGNIHOTRA is the patent need of the hour. We restate below the Fivefold Path which is the gist of the new teachings of all Divine Messengers.

Perform AGNIHOTRA for the purification of the atmosphere.
Practice DAAN to reduce attachment. (Daan is sharing your assets in a spirit of humility.)
Practice TAPA (Self discipline, austerities) for fruition of thy affirmations.
Practice KARMA (Good action) for self purification.
Practice SWADHYAYA (Self-study, who am I?) for liberation.

This is the Fivefold Path. Whatever be your formal religion, whosoever may be your Guru, the practice of the Fivefold Path will make you a better member of your community. Ultimately, it is the mind that is to be dealt with. Buddha's sermon at Saranath after attaining Bodhi and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount both lay great stress on the purity of the mind. The practice of the Fivefold Path is the most practical way to reach that pinnacle of glory which Buddha termed NIRVANA.

Buddha's Relics...An Interesting Episode

...By Vasant

After the MAHANIRVANA of BUDDHA, the Blessed One, the relics were divided into ^{Seven} urns. Each urn contained ashes, bones and some parts of articles which were in the daily use of the Master. When Ashoka, the then Emperor of India (274-232 B. C.) became Buddhist by conviction, he thought it would be better if the relics would be spread all over the country instead of remaining in ^{Seven} places. All the urns except one were brought at one place and the material was redivided into hundreds of urns. Ashoka ordered that all the urns be deposited underground exactly at the same moment. It would be quite a problem if we were to do it today using electronic equipment. In those days astronomy was a very well-developed science in the country. The astronomers achieved this miraculous feat of depositing the urns simultaneously at a few hundred places in the country.

Many centuries later, the British invaders of India, much against the wishes of the people, tried to unearth one such urn located near Bombay. It was found that the urn contained ashes, bones and parts of articles in daily use of the Master. The urn was again put under the earth.

Quotations from DHAMMAPADA

Cross the ocean of life by eliminating desire. Desire leads to rebirth. When no desire is left there is no rebirth.

If a person acts out of evil intent, pain follows him as wheel follows the hoof of the ox that is yoked to the cart.

When ye are free from hate and lust ye walk swiftly towards NIRVANA (final liberation).

We ourselves have to tread the Path
Buddhas merely show the way.

Today, nearly one person in four out of the world population calls himself Buddhist. To become a true follower of the Blessed One, we have to fill the planet with Love. His will be done.

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