

Ven. Ilukevela Dhammarathana Thero
Lecturer
B.A.(hons), (BPU), M.A, MPhil (Kelaniya)
The Department of Buddhist Philosophy
The Faculty of Buddhist Studies
Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka
E-mail: idhammarathana@bpu.ac.lk

Gotama Buddha; the Greatest Philosopher

The reality of the world was realized by the Buddha in 6th century B.C. in India in a time when many views have been proclaimed by different teachers. Buddha was not someone who introduced new teachings. His currier was to reveal the reality of the word and the being.¹ Buddha mentioned that what he had been revealed viz. Four Noble Truths was the existent in the world that had been disappeared by the time because of the unintelligence or ignorance.² In other words, the reality was covered by the dark clouds of the ignorance. Buddha did not belong to any country, clan, creed, or religion. He was not a part of anything. He severely rejected all sorts of classifications of the human beings. He accepted only the humanity that could be separated from the other beings. It is said that with regard to different kinds of grasses, trees, beetles, moths, ants, four-footed creatures big or small, reptiles, snakes, long-backed animals, fishes and birds, differences are seen. They are of different kinds within their groups possessing different identities of their own. But with regard to the man no such differences is seen in relation to their hair or head or ear or eyes or mouth or lips or brows or throat or hips or belly or back or rump or sex organs or breast or hands or feet or fingers or nails or thighs or colour or voice. No variant unique marks are found on the bodies of men to claim dissimilarity.³

¹ Brahmajala Sutta, D.N. vol.i, PTS, p.12

tathāgato sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedeti

² Dutiyakulaputta Sutta, S.N. vol.5, PTS, p.415

yehi keci, bhikkhave, atītamaddhānaṃ kulaputtā sammā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitā yathābhūtaṃ abhisamesuṃ, sabbe te cattāri ariyasacchāni yathābhūtaṃ abhisamesuṃ, ye hi keci, bhikkhave, anāgatamaddhānaṃ kulaputtā sammā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitā yathābhūtaṃ abhisamessanti, sabbe te cattāri ariyasacchāni yathābhūtaṃ abhisamessanti. ye hi keci, bhikkhave, etarahi kulaputtā sammā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitā yathābhūtaṃ abhisamessanti, sabbe te cattāri ariyasacchāni yathābhūtaṃ abhisamessanti.

³ An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy, Pategama Gnanarama Thero, Ti-sarana Buddhist Association, Singapore, 1996, pp.74-75

Vasettha Sutta. M.N. vol.ii, PTS, p.196

*yathā etāsu jātīsu, lingaṃ jātimaṃ puthu
Evam natthi manussesu, lingaṃ jātimaṃ puthu
na kesehi na sīsehi, na kappehi na akkhihi
na mukkena na nāsāya, na otthehi bhamūhivā*

Just after the attainment of enlightenment, Buddha introduced Himself to Upaka when he was on the way to Kusinārā. Having met the Buddha he asked "who are you and who is your teacher?" In replying to the questions, Buddha said in verses.⁴

"All-vanquishing, all-knowing am I.

I am unadhering with regard to all things.

All-abandoning are released by the ending of craving with the aim of Nibbāna.

Having fully known by Myself, to whom should I say my teacher?"

"I have no teacher, and one like me cannot be found.

In the world with its devas, I have no counterpart.

For I am an arahant in the world."

"I am the unexcelled teacher. I am alone rightly self-awakened. I am unbounded."

Having heard the introduction made by the Buddha, Upaka said "From your claims, my friend, you must be an infinite conqueror." Buddha said:

'Conquerors are those who have reached fermentations' end. I have conquered evil qualities. Upaka, therefore, I am a conqueror.'⁵

At the introduction Buddha himself did not mention anything that could be sharply led to a religion or any other authority. According to the context he is a person who

*na gīvāya na aṃsehi, na udarena na pitthiyā
na soṇiyā na urasā, na sambāde na methune
na hatthehi na pādehi, naṃgulīhi nakhehi vā
na jaṃghāhi na ūrūhi, na vaṇṇena sarena vā
lingaṃ jātimayam neva, yathā aññāsu jātīsu.*

⁴ Ariyapariyesana Sutta, M.N. vol.1, PTS, p. 171

*Sabbābhibhū sabbavidhūhamasmi - sabbesu dhammesu anūpalitto
sabbāñjaho tañhakkhaye vimutto - sayam abhiññāya kamuddiseyyaṃ*

*na me ācariyo atthi - sadiso me na vijjati
sadevakasmin lokasmin - natthi me patipuggalo*

*ahañhi arahā loka - aham satthā anuttaro
ekomhi sammāsambuddho - sītibhūtosmi nibbuto*

⁵ Ariyapariyesana Sutta, M.N. vol.1, PTS, p. 171

*mādisā ve jinā honti - ye pattā āsavakkhayaṃ
jitā me pāpakā dhammā - tasmābhamūpaka jino.*

completely eradicated the defilements in a way that they do not grow again.⁶ It is the extinction of the defilements. Therefore, this is one of the incidents to prove that Buddha is not one of the revealers of religions.

Buddha was born in a time when more religions appeared. Though there were many religions at the time, Buddha was not an enemy of those religions. He had in his mind only the loving-kindness. He never fought against any religion. When He saw the wrong teachings He revealed them in a compassionate mood. And when He saw acceptable activities of the others, He appreciated them, and having made some editions where it is necessary, He asked His disciples to follow them. The best example that can be adduced here is the incident happened between the Buddha and Asibandhakaputta Gamini, the disciple of Niganthanataputta.⁷ Gamini came and approached to the Buddha and began to associate. The Buddha questioned Gamini with regard to the teachings of Niganthanataputta. Answering the question Gamini said that his teacher had been teaching not to kill animals, steal, sexual misconduct, telling lies, and if one follows killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and telling lies mostly they will be reborn in hell. Having discussed each of the precepts and showing the points that should be moderated, Buddha introduced them to the followers with the edition of four precepts.⁸ When those incidents are taken into consideration, we can easily recognize how far the Buddha is tolerated. Therefore, Buddha was not a leader or a partner of any religion and He did not have his own views but He revealed the reality before us.

Buddha is a person for all. He was born for the welfare of all.⁹ The proclamation made by the Buddha is stated in Ekapuggala Vagga:

⁶ Vaseṭṭha Sutta, M.N. vol.2, PTS, p.196
khīnāsavaṃ arahantaṃ

⁷ Sankhadhama Sutta, S.N. vol.4, PTS, p.317
Kathaṃ nu kho, gāminī nigaṇṭho nātaputto sāvakānaṃ dhammaṃ deseti? evaṃ kho bhante, nigaṇṭho nātaputto sāvakānaṃ dhammaṃ deseti. yo koci paṇaṃ atipāṭeti, sabbo so āpāyiko neraiko, yo koci adinnaṃ ādiyati, sabbo so āpāyiko neraiko, yo koci, kāmesu micchā carati, sabbo so āpāyiko neraiko, yo koci musā bhaṇati, sabbo so āpāyiko neraiko...

⁸ Sankhadhama Sutta, S.N. vol.4, PTS, p.317
Kathaṃ nu kho, gāminī nigaṇṭho nātaputto so pāṇātipātāṃ pahāya pāṇātipātā pativirato hoti. adinnādānaṃ pahāya adinnādānaṃ pativirato hoti. kāmesumicchācāraṃ pahāya kāmesumicchācārā paṭivirato hoti. musāvādaṃ pahāya musāvādā pativirato hoti, pisunāvācaṃ pahāya pisunāvācā pativirato hoti. pharusaṃ vācaṃ pahāya pharusāya vācāya paṭivirato hoti. samphappalāpaṃ pahāya samphappalāpā paṭivirato hoti. abhijjhaṃ pahāya abhijjhalu hoti. byāpādapadosaṃ pahāya abhyāpannacitto hoti. micchādīṭṭhiṃ pahāya sammādiṭṭhiko hoti.

⁹ Ekapuggala Vagga, A.N. vol. i, PTS, p.21

"Monks, there is one person whose birth in the world is for the welfare of many folk, for the happiness of many folk, who is born out of compassion for the world, for the profit, welfare and happiness of devas and mankind. Who is that person? It is a Tathāgata, who is Arahant, a fully Enlightened One. This, monks, is that one person."¹⁰

Though the Buddha stated that He was born for the happiness of many, He did not wish to convert anyone, who approached and listened Him, into a follower or disciple or partner of Him. There were occasions where the listeners were in an eager to embrace the Buddha. In those occasions Buddha has said "no you should not do that". The story of the Upali Gahapati could be traced here for an example. The Gahapati was a great follower of Niganthanāthaputta on whom all the people were looking at. In such a considerable time the Gahapati Upali, having discussed with the Buddha, decided to be a follower of Him. In that occasion, Buddha said "a person like you should not do that, be intelligent, think again".¹¹ Not only that but also Buddha said "you should not stop offering dāna to your teacher, Niganthanāthaputta, even though you may embrace me."¹² This is how the Buddha spread His teachings throughout the life-time.

When the contemporary society is being considered, the Buddha can easily concern as philosopher. However, He is different from the philosopher because what he proclaimed was depended on sensory or extrasensory perception. Guessing and presenting suggestions were not the methods appreciated by the Buddha. If the subject matter is out of the sensory perception He revealed them with three-fold Knowledge (*tisso vijjā*). They are:

Ekapuggalo, bhikkhave, loke uppajjamāno uppajjati bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam, katamo ekapuggalo? tathāgato araham sammāsambuddho. ayaṃ bhikkhave, ekapuggalo loke uppajjamāno uppajjati bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya attha hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam.

¹⁰ Buddhist images of human perfection: the arahant of the Sutta pitka compared with the Bodhisattva and the Mahādiddha, Nathan Katz, Motilal Banarsidass, 1990, pp.127-8

¹¹ Upali Sutta, M.N. vol.1, PTS, p.378

anuviccekāraṃ kho, gahapati, karohi, anuviccekāro tumhādisānaṃ nātamanussānaṃ sādhu hoti'ti

¹² Upali Sutta, M.N. vol.1, PTS, p.379

dīgharattaṃ kho te, gahapati, niganthānaṃ opānabhūtaṃ kulaṃ yena nesaṃ upagatānaṃ piṇḍakaṃ dātappaṃ maññeyyāsī'ti

1. *pubbenivāsānussatiñāna* - retro-cognitive knowledge
2. *cutūpapātañāṇa* - clairvoyance
3. *āsavakkhayañāṇa* - knowledge of the destruction of defiling impulses

With retro-cognitive knowledge Buddha could be able to recount his manifold previous existences in all their aspects and details.¹³ Clairvoyance is directed towards gaining knowledge of the decease and survival of beings and acquiring an understanding of karma: 'with his clear paranormal clairvoyant vision he sees beings dying and being reborn, the low and the high, the fair and the ugly, the good and the evil, each according to his karma...'¹⁴ With the knowledge of the destruction of the defiling impulses, he is able to verify the Four Noble Truths as well as the origin and cessation of the defiling impulses.¹⁵

On the other hand, the Buddha was omniscient, not in the sense that He knew everything, but that He could know anything should He so desire.¹⁶ In other words, He did not have the power of omniscient when He was walking, standing, sleeping, listening, preaching, etc.

According to the detailed mentioned above, the Buddha was not someone who converted anybody to practice his words or to follow Him but he revealed the reality of the world and the beings. Therefore, the teaching of the Buddha is open to all. His teachings are not to be a Buddhist but to be a wise. There is no any rule or regulation promulgated by Him to investigate or criticise. His teachings are open to all. Anyone can investigate and criticise him and his teachings. In *Vīmansaka Sutta*,¹⁷ Buddha stated the methods of investigation. One should firstly investigate the verbal and physical activities of the teacher (*kāya saṃvara* and *vacīsaṃvara*). The other processes of investigations are mentioned in *Chankī Sutta*.¹⁸

If someone wants to embrace Buddhism and be a follower, he should be one of the four in the order such as a monk (*bhikkhu*), nun (*bhikkhuni*), lay follower (*upāsaka*) or lay

¹³ *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, D.N. vol.1, PTS, p.82 / Early Buddhist theory of knowledge, K.N. Jayatilake, Delhi, 1980, p.441

¹⁴ do

¹⁵ do

¹⁶ *Tevijjavaccagotta Sutta*, M.N. vol. 1, PTS, p.482 / *Lokayatika Sutta*, A.N. vol.4, PTS, p.428
samano gotamo sabbaññū sabbadassāvi aparisesaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ paṭijānāti: carato ca me tiṭṭhato ca sutassa ca jāgarassa ca sattaṃ samitaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ paccupaṭṭhitanti. na me te vuttavādino, abbhāvikkhanti ca pana maṃ te asatā abhūtenā'ti
 see MNid.178,179; MNidA.223; SNA.i.18..

¹⁷ *Vīmansaka Sutta*, M.N. vol.i, PTS, p.317

¹⁸ *Chanki Sutta*, M.N. vol.ii, PTS, p.173

woman follower (*upāsika*). However, to learn and study Buddhism it is not possible to be a Buddhist.

Buddhism was not a religion with its birth though there can be seen some of the characteristics of religions in modern era. Specially, the Theravada Buddhist tradition, considering the contemporary Buddhist traditions, has added some of the features of religions because of the need of the society. However, Buddha did not reveal any religion and He is not a religious leader. He is the One who attained the Supreme Enlightenment.