

GREAT VIRTUES OF THE BUDDHA

By Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

The Buddha was an embodiment of all great virtues. In Him was the embodiment of the highest morality (*Sila*), deepest concentration (*Samadhi*) and penetrative wisdom (*Panna*) – qualities unsurpassed and unparalleled in human history. These great noble qualities were mentioned in the sacred texts dealing with the discourses of the Buddha.

Buddhists all over the world recite and contemplate on the nine sublime virtues as contained in the Pali formula, in their daily devotional exercises. Although the Buddha possesses various other noble qualities, here in this formula, only nine are depicted. It is not out of place to mention that in certain other schools of Buddhism, the followers have introduced diverse Buddhas by alluding to some of these great qualities of the Buddha. However, whatever may be the manner used to introduce the Buddha, it is a fact that all those historical Buddhas who appeared in this world, from time to time, were imbued with the same virtues and the same enlightenment. There should, therefore, be no differentiation in paying respects to any particular Buddha, if the designated Buddha is a real Buddha. Consequently, there should be no argument as to which Buddha is more powerful or superior to another Buddha:-

The following verses, in Pali, relate to the nine intrinsic virtues of the Buddha which Buddhist devotees recite when they pay homage to the Buddha:-

*“ Itipi So Bhagava Araham Samma-Sambuddho
Vijja-Carana-Sampanno Sugato Lokavidu
Anuttarro Purisa Damma-Sarathi Sattha Deva-
Manussanam Buddho Bhagavathi. ”*

The authenticity of this passage is unquestionable since it was derived from many important texts of the *Tipitaka* in the Buddhist canon as well as from amongst the forty methods of *Samatha Bhavana* – tranquil meditation on *Buddhanussati*, i.e. Meditation on the virtues of the Buddha.

A brief translation of the Pali passage is as follows:-

“ Such indeed is the Araham – perfect and worthy of homage, Samma sambuddho – omniscient, Vijja-carana-sampano – endowed with clear vision and good conduct, Sugato – well done, well spoken, Lokavidu – wise in the knowledge of the world, Anuttaro Purisa-damma-sarathi – peerless trainer of the untameable ones, Sattha-Deva-Manussanam – teacher of gods and men, Buddho – enlightened and showing the path to Enlightenment, Bhagavathi – Blessed.”

1. Araham

The Buddha is depicted as an Arahant in five aspects, namely:-

- He has discarded all defilements;
- He has suppressed all the enemies connected with the eradication of defilements;
- He destroyed the spokes of the wheel of existence;

- He is worthy of being given offerings and paid homage;
- He withheld no secrets in his character or in his teachings.

The Buddha was the greatest figure in human history, with a life perfect, infallible, blameless and spotless. At the foot of the Bodhi tree, He conquered all evil and attained the highest stage of sanctity. He put an end to all sufferings with His attainment of Nibbana. He was the World Honoured One so worthy of homage in all respects. His teaching contains no mysteries or secrets and is like an open book for all to come and see.

2. **Samma-Sambuddho**

The Buddha was designated as *Samma-Sambuddho* because He comprehended the existence of the world in its proper perspective and He discovered the Four Noble Truths through His own comprehension. Born a Prince, He renounced the world and strove for six long years seeking enlightenment. During this period, He approached all the renowned Teachers of the day and tried all the methods His teachers could teach Him. Having achieved the attainment even equivalent to that of His teachers, He still could not find the elusive goal of enlightenment. Finally, basing His research on rational understanding and treading a middle path, thus departing from the traditional way of legendary religious beliefs and practices, He found the final solution to the universal problems of unsatisfactoriness, conflict and disappointments (*Dukkha*). He discovered the Law of Cause and Effect which He assessed as the reality of the world, thereby becoming the Supreme Enlightened One.

3. **Vijja-Carana-Sampanno**

The term ‘Vijja-Carana-Sampanno’ , meant that the Buddha was endowed with perfect clear vision and exemplary good conduct. It has two significant aspects as indicated in the threefold knowledge and eightfold wisdom. The threefold knowledge is listed as follows:-

- Firstly, the Buddha could recall His past birth and trace back His previous existence as well as that of others.
- Secondly, apart from being able to recount the past, He had the unique foresight of being able to see into the future and visualised the whole universe at any single moment.
- Thirdly, He had that deep penetrating knowledge pertaining to Arahant hood.

On the eightfold wisdom, the Buddha was listed as having the unique gift of insight, the power of performing supernormal feats, a divine ear, the power of reading others ‘ thoughts, various physical powers, ability to recollect past births, a divine eye, and exquisite knowledge pertaining to a life of serene holiness.

With regard to the word “*Carana*” or good conduct, this aspect is divided into fifteen different categories or types of virtues which were fully imbued in the Buddha. These additional virtues are being classified as restraint in deed and word, restraint in the absorption of sense effects, moderation in the consumption of food, avoidance of excessive sleep, maintenance of crystal clear vision in faith, realization of shame in committing evil, realization of fear in committing evil, thirst for knowledge, energy, mindfulness and understanding – the four trends pertaining to the material sphere.

Panna and *Karuna* are reflected as wisdom and compassion, both of which are the basic twins whilst *Karuna* bestowed him with compassion to be of service to mankind. He realized through his wisdom what is good and what is not good for all beings and through His compassion He led His followers away from evil and misery. The great virtues of the Buddha enabled Him to shower the highest degree of dispensation to brotherhood and sterling qualities to all beings.

4. Sugato

The Buddha was also designated as Sugato which meant that His path is good, the destination is excellent and the words and methods used to show the path are harmless and blameless. The Buddha's path to the attainment of bliss is correct and pure, uncurving, direct and certain.

His words are sublime and infallible. Many well known historians and great scientists have commented that the only religious teaching which has remained unchallenged by science and free-thinkers is the Buddha-word.

5. Lokavidu

The term *Lokavidu* is applied to the Buddha as the one with exquisite knowledge of the world. The Master had experienced, known and penetrated into all aspects of worldly life, physical as well as spiritual. He was the first to make the observation that there were thousands of world systems in the universe. He was the first to declare that the world was nothing but conceptual. In His words, it is regarded pointless to speculate on the origin and the end of the world or universe. He was of the view that the origin of the world, its cessation and the path to the cessation thereof is to be found within the fathom – long body – the human being with its perception and consciousness.

6. Anuttaro Purisa-Damma-Sarathi

Anuttaro means matchless and unsurpassed. *Purisa-damma* refers to individuals to whom the gift of the Dhamma is to be endowed whereas *Sarathi* means a leader. These three terms taken together imply an incomparable leader capable of bringing wayward men to the path of righteousness. Amongst those who were persuaded to follow the path of the *Dhamma* and to shun evil were notorious murderers like Angulimala, Alavaka and Nalagiri, hundreds of robbers, cannibals and recalcitrants such as *Saccake*. All of them were brought into the fold of the Dhamma, and some even attained sainthood within their life-time. Even Devadatta, the arch-enemy of the Buddha was rehabilitated by the Buddha through His great compassion.

7. Sattha Deva-Manussanam

The Translation of this term is that the Buddha was a Teacher of *devas* and men. It is to be noted that ' *devas*' as used in this context refers to beings who, by their own good Karma, have evolved beyond the human stage which is not regarded as the final stage of biological evolution. *Devas* in the Buddhist context have no connection with ancient traditional theological myths. The Buddha was a remarkable Teacher who was flexible and capable of devising diverse techniques suited to the calibre and different mentalities of *devas* and human beings. He instructed everyone to lead a righteous way of life. The Buddha was indeed a universal Teacher.

8. **Buddho**

This particular epithet, *Buddho*, would appear to be a repetition of the second in this category, although it has its own connotation. *Buddho* means that the Master, being omniscient, possessed extraordinary powers of being able to convince others of His great discovery through His exquisite art of teaching others His Dhamma. His techniques were unsurpassed by any other Teacher. The term *Buddho* has its secondary meaning translated as 'Awakened' since the ordinary state of man is perpetually in a state of stupor. The Buddha was the first to be 'awakened' and to shake off this state of stupor. Subsequently He convinced others to be awake and to steer clear from the state of lethargic samsaric sleep or stupor.

9. **Bhagava**

Of all the terms used to describe the Buddha, the words '*Buddho*' and '*Bhagava*', used separately or together as '*Buddho Bhagava*' meaning the 'Blessed One' are most popular and commonly used.

Deserving awe and veneration, Blessed is His name. Therefore, the word '*Bhagava*' had various meanings as suggested by some commentators. The Buddha was termed '*Bhagava*' or the "Blessed One' because He was the happiest and most fortunate amongst mankind for having managed to conquer all evils, for expounding the highest Dhamma and for being endowed with supernormal and superhuman intellectual faculties.

These nine great qualities of the Buddha could serve as a subject for meditation if the various interpretations of each particular term are carefully scrutinized and their real intent and the essence grasped and absorbed. Mere utterance of the passage, without its full comprehension could not be considered effective even as a devotional tract. The best method would be to recite repeatedly and at the same time comprehend the full meaning of these utterances. Whilst so doing, one should also concentrate on these sterling qualities as true virtues to be emulated by all followers of the Buddha.

GREAT VIRTUES OF THE DHAMMA

By Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

The Buddha's teaching is generally called the Dhamma or Dharma. It is neither a revelation nor a legendary speculation with a theological twist. It is the Truth ever prevailing in the Universe, and a unique discovery by a great enlightened religious teacher. However, Buddhism is the modern term used for the Dhamma and named after its discoverer. Gautama, the Buddha, realized the Truth and proclaimed it to the world. There is no doubt that it is difficult for ordinary people to comprehend it properly, since their minds are invariably clouded with illusion.

There are many virtues of the Dhamma that make it sublime and perfect in the highest meaning of the term. However, there are three aspects of the Dhamma which are to be noted. The first aspect is the theory that should be learnt in its pristine purity. The second aspect is the sincere application and practice of the precepts and the living in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, by abstaining from all evil, doing good and purifying the mind. The third aspect is to develop wisdom and to attain full understanding of the realities of all phenomena.

Amongst the many virtues of the Dhamma, there are six salient characteristics mentioned in the most authoritative texts. These particular Dhamma virtues are chanted by Buddhists during their daily devotional observances. The popular Pali verse expounding these Dhamma virtues is as follows:-

Swakkhato Bhagavata Dhammo, Sanditthiko, Akaliko, Ehipassiko, Opanayiko and Paccattam Veditabbo Vinnuhi Ti.

A detailed description and explanation of these six salient characteristics are given hereon:-

1. **Swakkhato Bhagavata Dhammo**

This term means that the Dhamma was discovered and well-proclaimed by the Blessed One. This is considered as the common virtue of all the three aspects of the Teaching, namely the theory, the sincere practice and full realization while the rest of the terms are connected with the supramundane (*Lokuttarra*) which consists of the eight stages of sanctity and Nibbana – considered as the *Summum Bonum* of Buddhism.

The Dhamma is well-expounded by the Master. It is excellent at the beginning, excellent in the middle, and excellent at the end. It has no contradictions and interpolations and it does not deviate from its straight route. Just as every drop of water in the ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt, the Dhamma has one and only one taste at any time, the taste of Nibbanic bliss. The Dhamma is genuine in both letter and spirit. The subject matter of the Dhamma starts with Sila which is equated to right conduct, on which ' *Samadhi* ', a sense of tranquility of the mind is based. *Panna* or wisdom follows suit after ' *Samadhi* ' is firmly established.

The acquisition of Dhamma knowledge should commence with the study of the Dhamma by listening to learned lecturers expounding its intricacies and by understanding the correct methods for its practical application. Through constant practice, we should be

able to suppress mental defilements which results in the mind becoming serene, calm and blissful. The achievement of such a mental state will pave the way for the acquisition of higher knowledge which is called insight or ' *Vipassana* '. This insight knowledge when developed steadily would be the crowning glory of a brilliant achievement which can occur even within this lifetime.

The Buddha's explanation of the living being and the world constitutes the last word in human thought. Basing His findings on rational understanding, quite apart from traditions and legends of the day, the Buddha delved deep into the core of the Dhamma and emerged with his discovery of the realities underlying all phenomenal existence. Without being dictatorial or monopolistic, He proclaimed the Dhamma – a teaching which superseded all other teachings.

The Dhamma owes no allegiance to any so-called supreme power but was introduced by the Buddha on an individual basis, i.e. from man to man allowing freedom to the individual concerned to assess and think for himself the means to attain his own salvation without seeking any external aid. The Dhamma is universal and is of vital interest to mankind in any part of the world at any time.

Significantly, He gave His own rational and scientific interpretation to all the philosophical terms before they were used in His teaching of the Dhamma. For instance, *Kamma* which only denoted action prior to the Buddha, was given a new meaning as volition behind the action.

The noble Dhamma consistently denounced social injustice such as the rigid caste-system, human slavery and discriminatory low status accorded to females. The Buddha was never a dictator but a Teacher of spiritual democracy.

Starting with the *Tisarana* (three refuges) and culminating in the attainment of nibbanic bliss, a follower of the Buddha finds himself supremely secure under the guidance and protection of the Dhamma which was well proclaimed – *Svakkhato*.

2. **Sanditthiko**

Sanditthiko conveys the meaning that if the Dhamma is well studied and put into sincere practice, its beneficial results would be visible here and now. For instance, even if a wicked man, who happens to be a veritable curse to himself and to society, were to take refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma and commence a new life, all his troubles and miseries would come to an end. As shown by the life of Emperor Asoka, after embracing Buddhism he was transformed from being a wicked ruler known as Candasoka into a righteous one, Dhammasoka.

3. **Akaliko**

Akaliko implies that the beneficial effects to be derived from the practice of the Dhamma would not be delayed. The Dhamma, despite the length of time that has elapsed since its pronouncement, remains ever fresh and unchallenged. It runs parallel even with the latest scientific thought. If there is truth, that truth can never become old. Dhamma is that Truth which cannot grow old with age since it depicts the reality underlying all phenomenal existence in Samsara. Briefly, the Dhamma states that the world is unsatisfactorily and that greed happens to be the inevitable cause of this state of affairs.

The remedy for this unsatisfactoriness is the eradication of greed to be achieved through the practice of eight skilful factors known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

4. **Ehipassiko**

Ehipassiko constitutes an open invitation to all to come and see, to inspect, to scrutinize and if need be, even to criticize the Dhamma before accepting it because there is nothing mythical or mysterious about it. The Dhamma is pure and crystal clear. It is as pure as solid gold. The Buddha Himself declared: ‘ Do not accept what I say through mere respect towards me. Just as purity of gold is ascertained by melting or rubbing on a touchstone, likewise the Dhamma should be accepted only after very close scrutiny ‘. This fearless assertion of allowing the teaching to be closely examined marks the greatness of the Buddha and the unwavering truth of the sublime Dhamma.

5. **Opanayiko**

Opanayiko means that all sincere adherents of the Dhamma would be treading along the path that leads to eternal peace and happiness. The Dhamma states that there are four stages of a sanctity and fruition worth achieving by means of gradual development. The Dhamma leads its adherents from one stage to another until they find themselves fully liberated from all bonds and fetters of existence.

6. **Paccattam Veditabbo Vinuhi Ti**

This phrase ‘ *Paccattam Veditabbo Vinnuhi Ti* ‘ implies that the Dhamma is to be comprehended individually by the wise. No one can absorb the Dhamma on behalf of another person, just as no one can quench the thirst of another person by himself taking a drink. It can be observed that there are two significant aspects in this term: firstly, the attainment of enlightenment is individualistic in character and secondly, the Dhamma can only be comprehended by the wise.

The Buddha is not a saviour but an instructor – a Teacher who showed the path for others to tread. It is left to the individual concerned to observe *Sila*, right conduct and practise ‘ *Samadhi* ‘, right concentration and subsequently try to develop ‘ *Panna* ‘, the intuitive wisdom which enables the individual to work out his own emancipation through his own efforts.

