

Devotion in Buddhism

Three Essays

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Homage to the Buddha by Sabhiya on his Acceptance of the Doctrine

Ending, transcending ills
Cankerless Arahāt,
thy insight, light, and lore,
have brought me safe across!

For marking my distress,
for freeing me from doubt,
I laud thee, sage benign,
consummate master-mind,
great Kinsman of the Sun!

The doubts I had are solved by thee,
O Seer, O All-Enlightened Sage Immaculate!
With every perturbation rooted up
unfevered tranquil, strong in Truth art thou!

Great Victor! Paragon! Thy words rejoice
all gods, all Nāradas, all Pabbatas.
I hail thee noblest, foremost of mankind;
nor earth nor heaven holds thy counterpart!

Enlightened Master! Over Māra's hosts
triumphant! Sage, who, wrong propensities
uprooting, for thyself salvation found
and taught mankind to find salvation too!

Thou hast surmounted all that breeds rebirth
and extirpated canker-growths within!
With naught to bind thee thrall to life, thou'rt free
as forest lion from all fears and dread.

Even as a lotus fair to water gives
no lodgement, thou by good and bad alike
art unaffected. Stretch thou forth thy feet,
O Victor! I salute my Master's feet!

From *Buddha's Teachings* (Suttanipāta)
translated by Lord Chalmers (Harvard Oriental Series)

Devotion in Buddhism (I)

by Nyanaponika Thera

The Buddha repeatedly discouraged any excessive veneration paid to him personally. He knew that an excess of purely emotional devotion can obstruct or disturb the development of a balanced character, and thus may become a serious obstacle to progress on the path to deliverance. The history of religion has since proved him right, as illustrated by the extravagancies of emotional mysticism in East and West.

The suttas relate the story of the monk Vakkali, who full of devotion and love for the Buddha, was ever desirous to behold him bodily. To him the Buddha said: "What shall it profit you to see this impure body? He who sees the Dhamma sees me."

Shortly before the Buddha passed away, he said: "If a monk or a nun, a devout man or a devout woman, lives in accordance with the Dhamma, is correct in his life, walks in conformity with the Dhamma—it is he who rightly honours, reverences, venerates, holds sacred and reveres the Perfect One (*Tathāgata*) with the worthiest homage."

A true and deep understanding of the Dhamma, together with conduct in conformity with that understanding—these are vastly superior to any external homage or mere emotional devotion. That is the instruction conveyed by these two teachings of the Master.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Buddha disparaged a reverential and devotional attitude of mind when it is the natural outflow of a true understanding and a deep admiration of what is great and noble. It would also be a grievous error to believe that the "seeing of the Dhamma" (spoken of in the first saying) is identical with a mere intellectual appreciation and purely conceptual grasp of the doctrine. Such a one-sided abstract approach to the very concrete message of the Buddha all too often leads to intellectual smugness. In its barrenness it will certainly not be a substitute for the strong and enlivening impulse imparted by a deep-felt devotion to what is known as great, noble and exemplary. Devotion, being a facet and natural accompaniment of confidence (*saddhā*), is a necessary factor in the "balance of faculties" (*indriya-samatā*) required for final deliverance. Confidence, in all its aspects, including the devotional, is needed to resolve any stagnation and other shortcomings resulting from a one-sided development of the intellectual faculties. Such development often tends to turn around in circles endlessly, without being able to effect a break-through. Here, devotion, confidence and faith—all aspects of the Pali term *saddhā*—may be able to give quick and effective help.

Though the Buddha refused to be made the object of an emotional "personality cult," he also knew that "respect and homage paid to those who are worthy of it is a great blessing." The Buddha made this statement in the very first stanza of one of his principal ethical injunctions, the Discourse on Blessings (*Mahāmaṅgala Sutta*).¹ Mentioning the value of a respectful, reverential attitude together with the blessings of "avoiding fools and associating with the wise," the Buddha obviously regarded such an attitude as fundamental for individual and social progress and for the acquisition of any further higher benefits. One who is incapable of a reverential attitude will also be incapable of spiritual progress beyond the narrow limits of his present mental condition. One who is so blind as not to see or recognize anything higher and better than the little mud-pool of his petty self and environment will suffer for a long time from retarded growth. And one who, out of a demonstrative self-assertion, scorns a reverential attitude in himself and in others will

¹ See The Wheel No. 14 *Everyman's Ethics*, p. 19ff.

remain imprisoned in his self-conceit—a most formidable bar to a true maturity of character and to spiritual growth. It is by recognizing and honouring someone or something higher that one honours and enhances one’s own inner potentialities.

When the high heart we magnify,
And the sure vision celebrate,
And worship greatness passing by,
Ourselves are great.

Since respect, reverence and devotion are partial aspects of the Buddhist concept of confidence, one will now understand why confidence has been called the seed of all other beneficial qualities.

The nobler the object of reverence or devotion, the higher is the blessing bestowed by it. “Those who have joyous confidence in the highest, the highest fruit will be theirs” (AN 4:34). The supreme objects of a Buddhist’s reverence and devotion are his Three Refuges, also called the Three Jewels or Ideals: the Buddha, his Teaching (Dhamma) and the Community of saintly monks and nuns (Sangha).² Here, too, the Buddha is revered not as a personality of such a name, nor as a deity, but as the embodiment of Enlightenment.

A text often recurring in the Buddhist scriptures says that a devout lay disciple “has confidence, he believes in the Enlightenment of the Perfect One.” This confidence, however, is not the outcome of blind faith based on hearsay, but is derived from the devotee’s reasoned conviction based on his own understanding of the Buddha Word, which speaks to him clearly with a voice of unmistakable Enlightenment. This derivation of his assurance is emphasized by the fact that, along with confidence, wisdom also is mentioned among the qualities of an ideal lay follower.

We may now ask: Is it not quite natural that feelings of love, gratitude, reverence and devotion seek expression through the entire personality, through acts of body and speech as well as through our thoughts and unexpressed sentiments? Will one, for instance, hide one’s feelings towards parents and other loved ones? Will one not rather express them by loving words and deeds? Will one not cherish their memory in suitable ways, as for instance, by preserving their pictures in one’s home, by placing flowers on their graves, by recalling their noble qualities? In such a way, one who has become critical of the devotional aspects of religion may seek to understand the outward acts of homage customary in Buddhist lands when, with reverential gesture, flowers and incense are placed before a Buddha image and devotional texts are recited not as prayers but as meditation. Provided that such practice does not deteriorate into a thoughtless routine, a follower of the Dhamma will derive benefit if he takes up some form of a devotional practice, adapting it to his personal temperament and to the social customs of his environment. Buddhism, however, does not in the least impose upon its followers a *demand* to observe any outward form of devotion or worship. This is entirely left to the choice of individuals whose emotional, devotional and intellectual needs are bound to differ greatly. No Buddhist should feel himself forced into an iron-cast mould, be it of a devotional or a rationalistic shape. As a follower of the middle way, he should, however, also avoid one-sided judgement of others, and try to appreciate that their individual needs and preferences may differ from his own.

More important and of greater validity than outward forms of devotion is the basic capacity for respect and reverence discussed at the beginning of this essay, and also the practice of meditations or contemplations of a devotional character. Many benefits accrue from these, and hence it was for good reasons that the Enlightened One strongly and

² See Bodhi Leaves No. 5, *The Three Refuges*, by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli.

repeatedly recommended the meditative recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), along with other devotional recollections.³ Here again, the reference is to the embodied ideal; thus the Buddha, as a being freed from all traces of vanity and egotism, could venture to recommend to his disciples a meditation on the Buddha.

What, then, are the benefits of such devotional meditations? Their first benefit is *mental purification*. They have been called by the Buddha “efficacious procedures for purifying a defiled mind” (AN 3:71). “When a noble disciple contemplates upon the Enlightened One, at that time his mind is not enwrapped in lust, nor in hatred, nor in delusion. At such time his mind is rightly directed: it has got rid of lust, is aloof from it, is freed from it. Lust is here a name for the five sense desires. By cultivating this contemplation, many beings become purified” (AN 6:25).

If, by practising that devotional meditation, one endeavours to live, as it were, “in the Master’s presence” (*sathā sammukhībhūta*), one will feel ashamed to do, speak or think anything unworthy; one will shrink back from evil; and as a positive reaction, one will feel inspired to high endeavour in emulation of the Master’s great example.

Images, and not abstract concepts, are the language of the subconscious. If, therefore, the image of the Enlightened One is often created within one’s mind as the embodiment of man perfected, it will penetrate deeply into the subconscious, and if sufficiently strong, will act as an automatic brake against evil impulses. In such a way the subconscious, normally so often the hidden enemy in gaining self-mastery, may become a powerful ally of such an endeavour. For the purpose of *educating the subconscious*, it will be helpful to use a Buddha image or picture as an aid in visualization. In that way concentration of mind may be attained fairly soon. For evoking and deeply absorbing some features of the Buddha’s personality, his qualities should be contemplated, for instance in the way described in the *Visuddhimagga*.

The recollection of the Buddha, being productive of joy (*pīti*), is an effective way of *invigorating the mind*, of lifting it up from the states of listlessness, tension, fatigue and frustration, which occur during meditation as well as in ordinary life. The Buddha himself advised: “If (in the strenuous practice of meditation, for instance) in contemplation of the body, bodily agitation, including sense desires, or mental lassitude or distraction should arise, then the meditator should turn his mind to a gladdening, elevating subject” (SN 47:10). And here the teachers of old recommend especially the recollection of the Buddha. When those hindrances to concentration vanish under its influence, the meditator will be able to return to his original meditation subject.

For a beginner especially, attempts at gaining concentration are often frustrated by an uneasy self-consciousness; the meditator, as it were, squints back upon himself. He becomes disturbingly aware of his body with its little discomforts, and of his mind struggling against obstacles which only grow stronger the more he struggles. This may happen when the subject of meditation is one’s own physical or mental processes, but it may also occur with other subjects. In such a situation, it will be profitable to follow the advice given earlier and to turn one’s attention from one’s own personality to the inspiring visualization of the Buddha and the contemplation of his qualities. The joyful interest thus produced may bring about that self-forgetfulness which is such an important factor for gaining concentration. Joy produces calm (*passaddhi*), calm leads to ease (*sukha*), and ease to concentration (*samādhi*). Thus devotional meditation can serve as a valuable *aid in attaining mental concentration* which is the basis of liberating insight. This function of devotional meditation cannot be better described than in the words of the Master:

³ See *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Chapter VII.

“When a noble disciple contemplates upon the Enlightened One, at that time his mind is not enwrapped in lust, nor in hatred, nor in delusion. At such a time his mind is rightly directed towards the Perfect One (*Tathāgata*). And with a rightly directed mind the noble disciple gains enthusiasm for the goal, enthusiasm for the Dhamma, gains the delight derived from the Dhamma. In him thus delighted, joy arises; to one who is joyful, body and mind become calm; calmed in body and mind, he feels at ease; and if at ease, the mind finds concentration. Such a one is called a noble disciple who among humanity gone wrong, has attained to what is right; who among a humanity beset by troubles, dwells free of troubles.” (Mahānāmasutta, AN 6:10)

Devotion in Buddhism (II)

By Ācārya Buddhārakkhita

Religion and devotion are inseparable, and Buddhism is no exception to this rule. Theravada or Buddhism based on the Pali Tipiṭaka, the original Teachings of the Buddha (sometimes called Hīnayāna), is alleged by some to be dry and intellectual, to have no devotion or higher emotional content in it. There may be some truth in this allegation when it concerns those people who only superficially profess adherence to the Teaching (Dhamma) or who limit themselves only to an intellectual study and appreciation of the Dhamma without applying its tenets to their everyday life. For the true follower of Theravada, however, devotion is an indispensable aid on the way to Deliverance. For him even the word “Buddha” can produce the deepest emotional stirring and rapture.

Dhamma, said the Buddha, may be compared to a snake which if caught by the head is brought under control but if seized by the tail, carries death. Similarly the Dhamma rightly understood and lived, leads to the extinction of all suffering, but will cause harm if misunderstood and misapplied.⁴ If we are to accept that Buddhism starves emotion and lays emphasis on reason alone then it would have been impossible for Buddhism to flourish for more than 2500 years as a living religion providing the spiritual and cultural requirements of millions. Countries like Burma, Thailand, Ceylon, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam cannot conceivably be supposed to have quenched their spiritual thirst with mere dry abstractions. Further, emotion, as a distinct mental factor, cannot be suppressed; it is bound to express itself. In point of fact, the balancing of these two mental faculties, emotion and reason, is considered in Buddhism most essential for a harmonious spiritual development. Harmony, moderation and gradual development are features that run through the entire system of Buddhism like a scarlet thread.

In the theistic conception of *bhakti* or faith, devotion is always accompanied by practices like prayers, rituals, vows, and an unquestioned obedience to a Creator God, his earthly incarnation or some deity. There is fear of being punished if the command of God is either questioned or not followed with submission. And wherever there is fear there will arise blind faith, dogmatism, superstition, ritualism, intolerance and such other evil consequences, because fear restricts mental growth, traps the mind and makes it insular. Prayers, rituals and vows lead men to ask and crave for worldly boons and pleasures while alive, and for happy states on earth or in heavenly worlds, after death. Love taking the form of an uncontrolled emotional devotion may, and often does, create selfish affection (*sneha*) and a physical relationship between the devotee and his or her lord which in many cases may turn carnal. Being associated with religion, such indulgences may remain undetected and even become a holy practice which could be conducted unhindered. This would give one a free licence to roam in the wilderness of vague imaginations. One waits for the saving grace of the God in all activities and thereby loses self-confidence and becomes indolent and a slave to superstitions. Devotion should not be wholly emotional, for it may grow positively harmful in that the devotee may become fanatical or, having become too sensitive emotionally, get upset by little mishaps or gains.

Against such one-sided emphasis, the concept of devotion in Theravada Buddhism is distinctly different. Devotion from this stand-point is *nāṇasampayutta*; i.e. accompanied by Knowledge, so that it presents, on both the philosophical and emotional level, a strong

⁴ See *The Discourse on the Simile of the Serpent* (Majjhima Nikāya No. 22. Alagaddūpama Sutta).

contrast to those religions which lay emphasis on emotion alone. The philosophical aspect calls into play two important mental faculties, viz., the rational and the volitional. The emotional aspect has, as it were, many facets, bringing together several mental factors, such as gratitude, reverence, love, faith or confidence, and joy. For as much as devotion is a culture of mind, it sets on foot a harmonious development of all the mental faculties bringing about integration and wholeness of character required for the attainment of Nibbāna. What part each of these different faculties play in the act of devotion, will be discussed later.

The object of devotion in Buddhism is what is known as the “Triple Gem” (*Ratanattāya*) or the “Threefold Refuge” (*Saraṇattaya*), comprising the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha; that is, the Enlightened One, his doctrine and the order of his noble disciples, i.e. the *ariyas* or saints. The Three Gems are so called because nothing can be more precious and worthy of bestowing incomparable and unalloyed peace and happiness than these; hence they are also the highest refuge, the peerless source of security and protection.

The practice of devotion consists of reflecting or meditating (*anussati*) on the qualities or attributes of that Triple Gem. These qualities are embodied in the most simple yet profound formula known as *Ratanattāya Vandanā Gāthā*—the Verses of Homage to the Triple Gem—familiar to all Buddhists from the time they learn to speak, which they recite on all occasions of worship.

*Iti pi so Bhagava, Arahaṃ, Sammāsambuddho, vijjācaraṇasampanno, sugato, lokavidū,
anuttaro purisadammasārathi, satthā, devamanussānaṃ, Buddho, Bhagavā-ti.*

“Thus, indeed, is that Blessed One, he is the Holy One, fully enlightened, endowed with vision and conduct, sublime, the knower of worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the teacher of gods, and men, enlightened and blessed.”

*Svākkhāto Bhagavatā dhammo, sandiṭṭhiko, akāliko, ehipassiko, opanayiko, paccattaṃ veditabbo
viññūhī-ti.*

“Well-expounded is the Dhamma (teaching) by the Blessed One, verifiable here and now, with immediate fruit, inviting all to test for themselves, leading on to Nibbāna, to be comprehended by the wise, each for himself.”

*Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho, ujupaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, ñāyapaṭipanno
bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho sāmīcipaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho; yadidaṃ cattāri
purisayugāni aṭṭhapurīsapuggalā, esa bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, āhuneyyo, pāhuneyyo,
dakkhiṇeyyo añjalikaraṇīyo, anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassā-ti.*

“Of perfect conduct is the Order of the Lord’s Disciples, of wise conduct is the Order of the Lord’s Disciples, of dutiful conduct is the Order of the Lord’s Disciples; that is to say, the Four Pairs of men,⁵ the Eight persons. This Order of the Lord’s Disciples is worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of reverential salutation, as an incomparable field of merit to the world.”

Space does not permit to go here into the details of the practice of devotional meditations. Briefly, it is meditating on the true significance of these attributes—nine of the Buddha, six of the Dhamma, ten of the Sangha—and accomplishing an inner transformation by implanting them, as it were, within.

Buddha is venerated and followed as the Great Teacher, the spiritual Master. The term Buddha is an honorific expression implying the attainment of Supreme Enlightenment; that

⁵ The Four Pairs and Eight Persons refer to the four stages of Sainthood endowed with the eightfold Supramundane Knowledge of Path (*Magga*) and Fruition (*Phala*)

is to say, it is not a personal name but an indication of a state of perfection. It is also an attribute of a perfect and holy guide who, by virtue of having discovered a truth unaided and through long and painful struggle, guides, points out and makes known to beings, out of great compassion, the nature of reality otherwise called the Four Noble Truths—*cattāri ariya saccāni*. These are embodied in this succinct and profound saying of the Master: “Sorrow I point out and sorrow’s end”.

Hence, to the Buddhists the Buddha is not a God or an incarnation of a God (*avatāra*), nor is he an ever abiding universal principle; and the Buddha has no commandments to give which need be accepted with unquestioning obedience. Prayers to him, or rituals and vows, and blind faith in him have no meaning whatsoever.

Dhamma here constitutes the transcendental truths of Nibbāna as well as the Eightfold Path leading to Nibbāna as discovered and proclaimed by the Buddha. Here reflection (*anussati*) is meditation on the Dhamma’s transcendental qualities, that is to say, meditation on that perfect state of deliverance which is freed from greed, hate and delusion—the sources of all *samsāric* turmoil,—and a condition of peace and bliss that terminates death and rebirth for all time. It is also meditation on that perfect path which leads to this perfect goal, namely, on Right Understanding, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

Sangha is the Order or Community of Noble Disciples (*ariyas*) established in the goal or on the path that leads to the goal; thus forming the ‘living example’ to those still striving.

Briefly, Buddha is the Way-finder, the Supreme Teacher, the Unmatched Guide; Dhamma is the incomparable Way, the Perfect Teaching; the Sangha refers to those who, dedicating themselves to the full realisation of the Dhamma and earnestly striving, have entered upon the Paths of Sanctitude.

In the course of the actual practice of devotion, these three, however, embody and culminate in one idea, one Truth. Hence it is said:

*Dhammakāyo yato satthā,
Dhammo satthā tato mato;
Dhamme t̥hito so saṅgho ca
satthu saṅkham nīgacchati.*

Since the Teacher is the Truth-embodiment,
so is the Truth the very Teacher,
and the Noble Order being established on the Truth,
Also goes by the name of the Teacher.

Thus the act of devotion is directed to one single object which forms the Guide as well as the Goal, independent of, and unmixed with, the notion of any personality or incarnation, a God or *Paramātman*, but purely as an aspiration for an ideal of absolute perfection and purity, attainable through self-control, discipline and mental development.

Devotional acts with such background and based on the realisation of these great attributes, set going mental dispositions favourable to the attainment of similar qualities in one’s own mind, be it even to a small degree. At first, they appear as a rather unimportant contribution to the attainment of the lofty goal, but the cumulative effect of a series of such devotional acts later grows and transforms itself until it becomes of the same stuff—*evam dhammo*—as these great attributes, i.e., of the very truth. Further, this form of devotion with mental faculties well-balanced, maintains itself as a habitual frame of mind and not as an isolated act spasmodically indulged in, thus ensuring a steady progress. When devotion

reaches a very high point, the distinction of subject, i. e. the self-notion, disappears and what is realised is the very 'stuff', nature or substance of the Triple Gem. Hence devotion is directed towards an ever-present reality and not merely towards a dead teacher or empty abstractions.

As mentioned earlier, a devotional act calls into play many forces and faculties of the mind. The most important of these is faith (*saddhā*) in the Triple Gem, which, in Buddhism, means conviction and confidence born of knowledge. Faith is associated with other factors such as gratitude, love, joy and deep reverence, forming as a whole, what may be called here, the emotional aspect. In as much as this *saddhā* or conviction born of knowledge contains no element of selfish affection (*sineha*) nor personal relationship nor blind faith, it differs essentially from the theistic concept of faith and devotion. The basis of *saddhā* is wise understanding of the true significance of the Triple Gem with respect to the problem of suffering and the deliverance from it. At least it must be accompanied by a deep conviction in the 'Law of Kamma' as a factor that sustains and perpetuates this endless course of birth and death, and the suffering associated with life.

Since *saddhā* is the one indispensable factor that governs all spiritual endeavour, it is called the seed (*bīja*) from which is born the 'tree of wisdom' that bears the 'fruit of deliverance'. There are five mental powers (*bala*), also called spiritual faculties (*indriya*): namely, *saddhā*—faith; *virīya*—energy; *sāti*—mindfulness; *samādhi*—concentration; *paññā*—intuitive insight or wisdom. Of these the primary factor is *saddhā* which, if properly cultivated, conditions the development of the rest. In its highest, i. e. supramundane sense, *saddhā* is *aveccapasāda*, unshakable faith in the Triple Gem—achievable through the attainment of the Noble Path (*ariya magga*). And only in this sense is it true 'self-surrender' which is the culmination of devotion. Self-surrender, in the Buddhist sense, is not a spiritual unification with some other entity or merging with some universal principle nor the sacrifice of one's will at the feet of someone else, a God, deity or teacher. But it is the entire abandonment, down to the last vestige, of all 'self-notion', of 'personality-belief' (belief in an immortal self)—*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*. When accomplished, this brings to pass the overcoming of at least two other mental fetters (*samyojana*), namely, sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) and clinging-to-rites-and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*). Lastly since *saddhā* rouses other concomitant factors, such as assurance, joy, gratitude and reverence, one will realise the tremendous significance of the Triple Gem as the true refuge from the toils and tumults of Samsāra. A deliberate and conscious cultivation of this one factor, therefore, means the development of the entire emotional aspect which forms the source of all mental energy.

This brings us to the philosophical side with its two faculties, the rational and the volitional. The function of the rational faculty is to investigate and probe into the nature of existence in order to understand, at least intellectually, its reality in the true perspective. It is the dispassionate and objective study and scrutiny of things. When one removes the lid of 'self' or 'ego-centric consciousness' from the jar of life and lays it bare for objective analysis and observation only then does true understanding spring up in the mind. It must be agreed that understanding is manifold and of various kinds, so that one particular object may also be explained in quite the opposite way, perhaps reasonably too! Hence, what is intended here is understanding in terms of the Noble Truths, according to which existence is regarded not as something permanent, pleasurable and endowed with a self or ego, but as an impersonal process, arising and passing away dependent on conditions; that is to say, as impermanent, subject to suffering and unsubstantial (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*).

It is a proven fact that the basic instinct in all beings is the search for happiness and pleasure, and security or safety against death, disease and danger, although it is quite

obvious that death is more certain than life. If life were not impermanent then there would be no need to crave for security and protection; likewise, the search for happiness and pleasure is another proof of the intrinsic suffering in life. The same is true of the self delusion; for, if there were such a thing as an abiding self then it would mean that we would be free from the clutches of death and from all misery. 'Self' as an independent entity, unaffected by all empirical fetters and limitations, presupposes 'ownership', and the status of being the 'master' and 'possessor' of this life. Nobody ever wishes to suffer or to die. If there were an eternal or divine self, then it would prevent all forms of suffering, death, etc. But that does not happen. Why would such a freed, happy and permanent self need to strive for freedom, happiness and security? And where is the need for religion which aims at these attainments? The reality, however, is that there is only a self-delusion which is the root of all suffering and the cause of all limitation. Conditioned by this delusion, known to Buddhists as *avijjā*, beings engage themselves in this mad rush of activities driven all the time by manifold cravings. Actions must produce reactions and these acts of craving that we always and almost helplessly perform cannot escape from producing results, namely the continuity of this stream of life, this cycle of births and deaths. But this inherent unsatisfactoriness in saṃsāric existence need not create undue anxiety, frustration or pessimism; in fact, it should be the greatest incentive to hope, assurance and optimism. For the opposite of suffering too must exist. If only these actions are free from craving—the root cause of suffering—there is no reason why lasting happiness and peace could not be achieved. This, a deathless state of supramundane happiness called "Nibbāna," is the goal of Buddhism.

With this background, it may be noticed the rational faculty is not limited to a barren intellectualism; besides causing a definite enrichment of the emotional faculty, it arouses the volition to transform knowledge into a living truth. Such understanding may arise as a result of study and hearing of the Dhamma (*sutamaya-ñāṇa*), or through deep thinking and observation of things as they really are (*cintāmayā-ñāṇa*), or again through meditation (*bhāvanāmayā-ñāṇa*). While Saddhā should have firm roots in right understanding, also true understanding on its part should not be devoid of Faith or Confidence in order to avoid the futility and dryness of remaining merely theoretical. The same is true in the case of will or determination. It must likewise be based on Saddhā in order to maintain the firmness and vigour by which theory is translated into practice.

This brings us to the function of the volitional faculty as purposive will, resoluteness or determination. It is the drive, the propulsive agency, that transforms knowledge into action. It functions on the basis of understanding, as a factor that harnesses mental energy for one-pointed application, for single-ness of aim. It frees intellect from dryness and prevents emotion from indulgence and over-activity, that is, from undue dissipation of mental energy, thereby mobilizing purpose and concentrated effort. Although this faculty has been mentioned last, it is not less important than the other two. After all, it is volition that invests every action, whether in body, speech or mind, with the potentiality of producing results. And devotion as an act leading to deliverance must necessarily have a powerful volition. In fact, all these three faculties are mutually complimentary in the realisation of the common goal, Nibbāna.

It may not be inappropriate if the simile of the construction of a building is used to illustrate the functions of these faculties; for devotion is also a constructive activity after all. Understanding is like the plan and estimates; will is the actual execution of the work of construction according to the plan; and faith, *saddhā*, is like the building materials needed for the construction.

Without a proper plan, a construction may prove positively dangerous, and the exclusion of the other two would mean no construction whatsoever. Thus the task of building a spiritual structure is accomplished in Buddhist devotion with the mutual co-operation and assistance of all the various faculties of the mind.

The Venerable Dhammapāla's Salutation to the Triple Gem

Lord of great compassion, voyager, Thou,
Across the knowledge-sea, to Thee I bow.
Thou by method fine, vivid and profound,
The path dost well proclaim.

What leads from the world the men who bring,
Life-mode and love to fullness, that Best Thing,
To which the Perfect One both homage pay,
That Thing do I revere.

Who in path and fruition steadfast stand,
With virtue and such goods, the noble band,
Unrivalled field for reaping merit rich,
That band do I revere.

From the Udāna Commentary
Translated by Soma Thera

Flower Offering by Kassapa Thera

*Nirodha-samāpattito vuṭṭhahitvā viya nisinnassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa,
iminā, pupphena pūjemi, pūjemi, pūjemi. Idam puppha-pūjaṃ Buddha-Pacceka-buddha-
Aggasāvaka-Mahāsāvaka-Arahantānam sabhāvoasīlaṃ, aham'pi tesam anuvattako homi.*

*Idam pupphaṃ idāni vaṇṇenapi suvaṇṇam, gandhenapi sugandham saṅṭhānenapi
susaṅṭhānaṃ, khippameva dubbaṇṇaṃ duggandhaṃ dussaṅṭhānaṃ pappoti.*

*Evameva sabbe saṅkhārā, aniccā, sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā, sabbe dhammā anattā'ti. Iminā
vandanamānana-pūja-paṭipattiyānubhāvena āsavakkhayāvahaṃ hotu cittaṃ sabbadukkhā
pamuccatu.*

An English rendering of the above Pali formula repeated while offering flowers, is as follows:

“As if to the Blessed One, the Holy One, the Perfectly Awakened One—newly arisen from uttermost ecstasy, with these flowers, reverentially I make offering.

“This reverential flower-offering was a virtuous practice of the Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, the Chief Disciples, the Great Disciples and the Arahats. I also am following on their path hereby.

“These flowers are now in colour lovely, in scent sweet, in shape beautiful; soon they will be discoloured, ill-smelling and ugly. So too all things compounded: they pass away, are pain-laden and soulless.

“May this worship, adoration, and reverential offering, through the lofty dignity and psychic power of the practice, help to root out the corruptions. May I gain release from all suffering”.

Flower gifts to those loved, trusted and respected have been an ancient and honoured custom of the East. Flower-offering was made by the Buddha Dīpaṅkara to the ascetic Sumedha, who too having resolved to be a Buddha then obtained from the Perfect One the first *niyata vivaraṇa*—or assurance of success in the aspiration for Buddhahood.

It is recorded that the gods offered flowers to the future Buddha at his birth, and again on his enlightenment and death (*parinibbāna*).

The Buddhists offer flowers to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. The Buddha is the embodiment of wisdom, He is the supremely Enlightened One; he who, out of compassion for the countless throng of sentient beings, crossed this Sea of Saṃsāra, of Birth, Decay and Death, after a ceaseless effort extending over aeons. The Dhamma is the Navalokuttara Dhamma (the ninefold supramundane or hypercosmic), i. e. the four Paths (*magga*) and Fruits of Sanctitude (*Phala*) thereof and Nibbāna, which does not exist outside Buddhism and which alone offers a solution to the Riddle of Life.

The Sangha are those who have attained these Paths and Fruits: Sotāpatti, Sakadāgāmī, Anāgāmī and Arahāt. The monks of the present day too are making an earnest endeavour to attain to these sublime states. Hence it is a mistake to suppose that Buddhist monks are a lazy lot, for they are engaged in wholly meritorious work; the difference in the several individuals is only in the degree of earnestness and zeal displayed. Theirs is a life of renunciation. Only the good Buddhist layman knows and can appreciate this.

There being no Buddha living, the Buddhists worship the three *cetiyas* (stupas; literally meaning, pegs on which to hang one's thoughts). They are: (1) *pāribhogika*, the things used by the Buddha, e. g. the Bo-tree at his Enlightenment, which now serves as a symbol of Bodhi or enlightenment; (2) *sarīrika*, the body relics of the Buddha which are now mostly enshrined in the several *cetiyas*; and (3) *uddesika*, the image beautiful of the Buddha. He sees in his mind the golden figure of the Buddha, and a six-rayed aura around his head, a radiantly perfect body and the brilliant glory of his mind. It is the mind's eye and not the physical eye that is active. The offering is to the One who worked through many aeons out of compassion for the ones who take refuge in him. It is only an acknowledgement of one worthy of honour.

But in no wise does the Buddhist ask of him pardon or blessings. He only reflects on his perfections, learns to be self-reliant like him, to be humble and to honour those worthy of honour and so dispel pride. This last, be it noted, is what an envious man is unable to do.

Dāna, *sīla*, *bhāvanā* (charity, a virtuous life and meditation) help to root out greed, hatred and ignorance which make this life of ours what it is, a state of painful flux. Let us, as Buddhists would naturally do, submit this act of flower-offering to the cold light of reason and watch its results.

The flower is the acme of nature's perfection. It is beauty itself. Its lovely colour pleases the sight. Its softness pleases the sense of touch. The thought of it also is gratifying. The gift or *dāna* of it must indeed kill greed or *lobha* in the giver.

Of the two kinds of *sīla* (virtue), the negative and the positive, the flower-offering is of the positive kind, a good action. It is productive of a *kusala cetanā*, a meritorious thought, for at the time of offering one reflects that this has been the virtuous practice of the good and saintly of old, and that one is thus striving to follow those noble footsteps; and this is the *Sīla*, or right observance, where Hatred finds no room.

The *Bhāvanā* here is meditation on *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* (the transiency, sorrow and soullessness of life). It is this aspect of the flower-offering that raises this act to the highest psychic levels, to one of real usefulness in helping one to make headway along the grand highway—the noble Eightfold Path.

The flower blooms and is beautiful, in that it has lovely colours, emanates sweet scent, and is soft to the touch. But all this is not for long; for soon the flower will fade. This beauty which we adore and covet is a passing show. It is this same beauty that makes us cling to life. It is not real. It is only a mental concept, which varies even geographically.

Each nation has its own ideal of perfection of the human form. The Negro has his own and thinks his ideal the best. The Mongolian has one type of beauty, and the Aryan another. What then is "beauty"? It is only an idea. To the Buddhist, beauty is *anicca*. This beautiful body is food for worms. All things we value eventually turn to ashes in our grasp. Saṃsāra's "beauty" is a stumbling-block on the Noble Path to Nibbāna, which is the only beautiful.

That all things are transitory and therefore painful is not appreciated by the average Westerner, wrapt as he is in the world of sense. *Paññā* or wisdom, according to a Buddhist, is the due realisation of these all-pervading facts, the *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* (transiency, sorrow and soullessness) of ourselves and all that is about us. The ultimate Truth is understood only thus. Therefore a Buddhist *bhāvanā* is on a higher level than that of the yogi who is merely bent on gaining trances, by the cultivation of a "soul-force" delusion, which the Buddhist knows is a hindrance to ultimate salvation, and therefore to be suppressed.

The nature of a flower-offering is not to be despised; say not that it is "exoteric" Buddhism. Truly, it is exoteric, in its simple grandeur, to most Westerners and some Westernised Easterners. For the direct result of flower-offering is a *ti-hetuka* merit, one that is free from greed, hatred and ignorance, and the death of a person in that state of mind results in a *ti-hetuka* birth.

The last words of the Buddha, to the Thera Ānanda, on this subject should be borne in mind, and the flower-offering must not be merely a "gift" of love and reverence. The surest way to worship the Lord is to follow his precepts, to live the life as detailed by him. Therefore *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*, especially the last, must be included in this act of flower-offering. The flowers themselves serve as the peg on which to hang one's aspiring thoughts, the mind does the rest; it makes the simple act sublime.

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