

FLOWER OF MANKIND
by
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**‘ This is that Blossom on our human tree
Which opens once in many myriad years –
But opened, fills the world with Wisdom’s scent
And love’s dropped honey.’**

(Light of Asia)

This is a verse from Sir Edwin Arnold’s famous poem on the life of the Buddha, **Light of Asia**. When it was first published more than a century ago, it took England and the United States by storm. It ran to sixty editions in England and eighty editions in the United States in the course of a few years. Few hundred thousand copies were sold at a time when there were neither best-seller lists, nor the Book-of-the-Month Club. Most Western readers of the older generation had their impression of the Buddha from this poem.

Sir Edwin used the image of a tree to represent mankind, and the Buddha was depicted as a flower on that tree. This flower blooms only once in a myriad years, which means that humanity would have to wait for an immense period of time for this special flower to blossom. But once it blooms, it fills the whole universe with its fragrance of wisdom. And the love and compassion contained in it is as sweet as honey.

The analogy of a flower is apt to describe the Buddha. A flower emerges from a tree complete in its own glory. Although it draws strength and sustenance from the tree, it does so of its own effort, without the help of any supernatural creator. A beautiful flower simply exists. It does not need to explain why it is beautiful. The Buddha, too, simply ‘is’ the Buddha, the fully Self-Enlightened One, who depends on no god or follower for his existence.

A flower is appreciated and admired by both young and old. It exudes its fragrance without preference or discrimination. It does not say, ‘I will bring joy to only those who follow me.’ Similarly, the Buddha is an enlightened teacher who is appreciated by everyone, including non-Buddhists who study the master’s message with open minds. The message of the Buddha is delivered out of compassion for the benefit of all living beings, and those who seek the Truth can benefit from it.

The fragrance of wisdom and the honey-sweet compassion of the Buddha are attested to by many well-known poets, scholars, philosophers, historians, scientists, psychologists, free-thinkers, rationalists and even by agnostics. They have recognised him as an enlightened and liberal religious teacher who had rendered a great service to mankind through his rational interpretation of the ultimate truth.

Albert Einstein has said in his autobiography: ‘If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.’ He also said that Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future : it transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and the spiritual, and it is based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity.

A writer and world historian who is no doubt familiar to many is H.G. Wells. In his history book, Wells wrote: 'You see clearly a man, simple, devout, lonely, battling for light, a vivid human personality, not a myth. He gave a message to mankind universal in its character. Many of our best modern ideas are in closest harmony with it.'

Even an agnostic like Bertrand Russell, the foremost British philosopher in our times who was awarded a Nobel Prize, said that among the founders of all religions in this world, he respected only one man – the Buddha. The main reason was that the Buddha did not make statements regarding the origin of the world. Bertrand Russell said that the Buddha was the only teacher who realised the true nature of the world. But, while many others made unjustifiable claims based on rather simplistic logic on how the world originated, the Buddha did not commit himself to any statement about a beginning. This was because he knew his listeners did not have the proper intellectual training and understanding of the physical world to comprehend what he himself had discovered.

A flower in full bloom cannot keep the fragrance to itself. Similarly, soon after the Buddha had gained his Enlightenment, he decided to preach his Dhamma and share the supreme knowledge he had gained with suffering humanity. He surveyed the world and saw that there are beings who were able to understand the Dhamma he discovered. Out of pity for the world, he said, 'Open to them are the Doors to Deathlessness. Let those who have ears hearken and place their confidence in the Dhamma.'

Who is the Buddha?

There are many misinterpretations regarding the appearance of the Buddha in this world. Many people cannot understand who the Buddha actually is because of his appearance, serenity, and towering wisdom and understanding. When they compare his rational views and his personality with other religious teachers, they find that he is unique in many ways and his teachings are different from what anyone had thought of before. Therefore, they cannot believe he was an ordinary human being. That is why people have often asked whether he is an extraordinary super – natural being, a prophet or a messenger of a god. Some believe that the Buddha, with his supreme intellect, had learnt everything he knew from the existing Indian religious systems and philosophy, refined them and presented these old thoughts as a new doctrine.

All these views are not true. The Buddha had never claimed that he was sent as a messenger of any god. Nor did he say that he had heard any divine – voice which whispered into his ears to reveal certain commandments to be introduced as a religion. Furthermore, while the Buddha had studied all the existing systems of philosophical thought under the best teachers of his days, in none of these teachings could he find the life that he was seeking for.

He declared that he did not have any teacher who could teach him how to gain Enlightenment. He endeavoured to find someone who could enlighten him, but he could not find such a person. So he used his own effort, knowledge and understanding to gain this supreme wisdom. Buddhahood was the result of his own effort. Not only did he fully understand the Truth, he also taught the doctrine to enlighten others. He is, therefore, called a **Samma Sambuddha** or the Fully Enlightened One.

Was the Buddha a Human Being?

The Buddha was born as a human being. As a young prince, he was given the training required of a noble youth from the warrior clan. At the age of sixteen, he married his cousin, Yasodhara, who gave birth to his son, Rahula. After realising the universal

suffering of sickness, old age and death which afflicted all beings, he decided to renounce at the age of 29 and went in search of the Truth for 6 years. At the age of 35, he was Enlightened while meditating under the Bodhi Tree. He lived as a human being up to the time he was Enlightened. But can he be considered as a human being after enlightenment?

The answer was given by the Buddha to Drona, a brahmin, who noticed his footprints and realised at once that he could be no ordinary being. He approached the Buddha and asked if he was a god (**deva**), a heavenly musician (**gandhabba**) a demon (**yakkha**). The Buddha answered, “No” to all these questions. When he was asked whether he was a human being (**manussa**), the Buddha again answered that **he was not**. When asked who he was, the Buddha replied that he had defilement which condition rebirth as a **deva, gandhabba, yakkha** or a human being. He added:

**‘As a lotus, fair and lovely,
By the water is not soiled,
By the world I am not soiled;
Therefore, brahmin, I am Buddha.’**

When the Buddha attained Enlightened, he could **no longer** be considered as a human being in the normal sense of the world. He had attained the absolute state of the Unconditioned, the Eternal, unlike a normal human being who is bound to this planet by time and space. In addition, his mental state was at the supramundane level, not at the mundane level of unenlightened beings. He did not belong to any category of beings who were still bound in **Samsara**, He was not even a **deva** or **brahma** to whom many people pay homage. There is only one way to describe him – the Buddha, the Enlightened One who is completely liberated from a conditioned and relative existence and who has transcended time and space. Buddhas are enlightened beings who belong to a special lineage or species of beings known as **Buddha wangsa**.

It is important for us to keep this in mind because many non-Buddhist writers have described the Buddha as a wise teacher with a very good teaching. But alas, they say he was only human being, and his teaching is, therefore, limited to what a wise man is capable of, and no higher. These authors then offer some alternate teachings which they claim are divinely inspired.

Buddhists should not be taken in these arguments, especially if they remember that although the Buddha was born as a human being, he could no longer be considered to be a limited human being after Enlightenment. He lived and taught as a supremely enlightened being. He was the embodiment of Truth, and he once said, ‘ He who sees the Dhamma, sees me.’ This means that he had actually become an embodiment of the truth (**Dhamma**) itself. Conditioned by his human birth, he maintained his corporeal form during the forty five years after his enlightenment. When he died at the age of eighty, he attained **Mahaparinibbana** – which means that although he passed away in human form, he did not die as a human being, to be reborn again in some other form. **Maha Parinibbana**, is the unconditioned state of ultimate release. This unconditioned state is beyond our understanding of existence or non-existence as applied to human life or phenomena. Therefore, to ask questions about the existence or non-existence of beings in the state of **Maha Parinibbana**, is absolutely pointless.

The Hallmark of the Buddha.

The Buddha is indeed a unique being. He is the supremely enlightened being who arises

in this world out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of all. He appears rarely in this world. The **Dhammapada** says, 'Rare is the appearance of the Buddha.' The Buddha is described as the 'Accomplished One' (**Tathagata**), the Worthy One (**Araham**), the Fully Enlightened One (**Samma Sambuddha**) the Giver of Deathlessness (**amatassa data**) and the Lord of Truth (**Dhammassami**).

Once a Brahmin was so struck by the radiance and incomparable physical beauty of the Buddha that he was moved to ask if the Blessed One was a god. The Buddha explained:

**Known are the things to be known,
Cultivated are the things to be cultivated,
Destroyed are the things to be destroyed,
Therefore, Brahman, I am the Buddha.**

The stanza summarises the great qualities of the Buddha. He had realised the real nature of every component thing in the universe with his supreme wisdom. There are no controversies regarding what he taught. This is because there is no ambiguity or vagueness in his teachings, which could lead to endless arguments and lead men away from the ultimate goal of finding release from **Samsara**. If our judgements do not agree with his teachings, it is only because we have not yet realised the real nature of things. He had cultivated all virtues to perfection and upheld these qualities even at the risk of his own life. He had gone beyond the fluctuating human emotions and beyond all human frailties. He had eradicated all unwholesomeness, all selfishness and evil thoughts in the mind.

His Great Wisdom

The Buddha was self – enlightened. Although he went to some teachers to study under them, yet none of them could show him the way to ultimate Truth. Therefore, he decided to rely on his own effort to find the Truth. Once an ascetic who was so impressed by the radiant appearance of the Buddha asked him who his teacher was. The Buddha replied :

**'All have I overcome, all so I know,
From all am I detached. All have I renounced.
Wholly absorbed am I in the destruction of craving.
Having comprehended all by myself,
Whom shall I call my teacher?'**

Like a flower in full bloom which cannot keep the scent to itself, the Buddha started spreading the sublime message soon after gaining Enlightenment. He decided to preach his Dhamma and share the supreme knowledge he had gained with suffering humanity. He was an incomparable teacher. In the verse traditionally recited by devotees on the virtues of the Buddha, it is said that he was completely and perfectly Enlightened (**samma-sambuddha**). He was also endowed with knowledge and virtue (**vijjacaranasampanno**) and knower of the words (**lokavidu**). In addition, he was an unsurpassed guide of those to be trained (**annuttaro purisadammasarathi**) and a teacher of gods and men (**sattha deva manussanam**).

Certain people are extremely proud of their intellectual attainment. They claim to have knowledge, but their knowledge is seldom coupled with wisdom. One western scholar admitted that the more we learn about things existing in the world, the more we create our own concepts and fantasies which are the product of our limited way of thinking and shaped by our limited senses. He said that instead of gaining wisdom, we have

increased our ignorance. People who claim to know many things only develop their egoism and sceptical views which create more confusion and disturb the peace and confidence in their minds. The knowledge and attitudes they maintain often create more misunderstanding and conflict instead of generating harmony and goodwill.

People may try to study about everything in this world and gain scientific knowledge which can explain many things previously unknown. Yet, this knowledge for what it is capable of cannot be regarded as wisdom. While modern man's knowledge about the physical universe is indeed very extensive, the real wisdom to fathom the true nature of human existence is still lacking. The Buddha's wisdom therefore is still relevant to the needs of modern man even during these times of advanced knowledge.

The Buddha's understanding of all universal phenomena is not mere knowledge, but insight wisdom arising from his spiritual realisation into the actual nature of the cosmos. We can get some idea of the depth of his profound wisdom when we study the **Four Noble Truths** he taught. Before listening to the Buddha, people were ignorant about many things : **Why were they here in the world? What did they really have to do as human beings? Was there an ultimate aim in life? Why was it that people could gain no satisfaction in life, despite their formidable store of knowledge?** Without the wisdom of the Enlightened One, people would have gone on developing more and more craving and selfish desire, under the impression that they were progressing. But is it really progress when such pursuits bring more fear, worries, uncertainty and insecurity? Is it really progress when these, in turn, create frustration and disappointment, which will later lead to conflict, clashes, jealousy and enmity? We know from our own experience that when people have only mere knowledge, scientific or other wise, but not supreme wisdom, they often are unable to live happily with themselves or with others.

The more we remain in this world, the more problems we will have to face. Life is a big physical and mental battle for those who are unenlightened. The Buddha, who had realised the nature of existence and its real cause, can show us the way to liberation. Only an enlightened religious teacher who has realised the root of all problems is able to guide mankind to face and overcome them. Only the Buddha who has conquered ignorance can teach us how to be free from being entangled in sorrow and despair. We are constantly in danger of being smothered by **greed, hatred** and **delusion**, the bad motivations responsible for all evil deeds. Only the Buddha can teach us how to eradicate these bad motivations through the training of our minds.

The Buddha understood that every component thing has what is known as the **Three Characteristics**. Every phenomenon is **impermanent**, and there can be no compounded thing which can remain unchanging for a single moment. Even modern scientists support the explanation given by the Buddha more than twenty five centuries ago that existence arises from the conflict or friction of elements and energies. In this dynamic process of continuous friction, things arise and change according to the causes which condition their existence. Therefore, it is the nature of all conditioned things to change, without which there can be no existence.

The second characteristic is **unsatisfactoriness** that underlies every component thing. Some people cannot understand why the Buddha spoke of unsatisfactoriness when in life there are many things which are attractive and beautiful, creating a sense of pleasure. They might seem so at the beginning, but what happens when these change? Dissatisfaction sets in. Since we cannot really prevent changes from taking place, as explained in the first characteristic of impermanence, in the final analysis we cannot

escape from unsatisfactoriness. In a sense, everything that satisfies our desires is the root of dissatisfaction later.

Throughout our life, we pray anxiously for this or that to happen. If we do not get what we pray for, we will be filled with longing or even frustration. If that prayer comes true, we will also be filled with unsatisfactoriness: our desires may change; it may bring problems we have not expected; it may also whet our appetite for more or better things. Also the moment a thing desired is obtained, other desires are created and unsatisfactoriness continues **ad infinitum**. Human desires are really insatiable!

Changes in the mental and physical spheres cause this unsatisfactoriness which we have to face daily. One moment, we may be happy and satisfied emotionally. But when that satisfaction starts to fade away, then frustration sets in. The Buddha realised this universal characteristic and explained that our **selfish desire** is really the cause of all our disappointments. Once we realise this truth, we have started the process to conquer disappointments. This is the beauty of Dhamma. Our attachment to worldly things, like the beautiful flowers in our garden, brings with it the seeds of dissatisfaction. When these beautiful flowers fade and wither away, we sigh with regret. Only the Flower of Mankind will live on forever through the Dhamma he teaches. Our faith in this special flower brings happiness because of the enduring nature of the Dhamma.

Unsubstantially is the third universal characteristic the Buddha realised. Most religions teach that there is a permanent entity which exists forever, but is it really so? All the other religious teachers tried to satisfy the craving which people have for eternal existence by introducing the concepts of an eternal soul or spirit and the possibility of this soul living on forever in an eternal existence. When the Buddha said for the first time that this belief is only imaginary, it went against popular belief and even today, people who are so blinded by the desire to live forever find it hard to accept as truth. The Buddha taught the Dhamma not for the sake of pandering to man's craving or ignorance, but for them to realise the ultimate reality of things. He taught us how to destroy **maya**, illusion, not to promise man some easy way out along a primrose path to heaven. It is only through the destruction of illusion and ignorance that one can really be free, and not otherwise.

His Great Compassion

The Buddha had developed every virtue, and all of them up to ultimate perfection. Throughout his wandering in samsara as a **bodhisatta**, he had aspired to practise the ten great virtues – generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity. He held on to his practice of these virtues without any wavering in his heart, even at the risk of his own life. He sacrificed his life many times in his previous births to save others. His actions were completely selfless, being prompted solely by compassion towards all beings. In serving others, he was not motivated by a desire for power or worldly possession.

But among all his great virtues, one great virtue of the Buddha that readily comes to mind alongside his great wisdom is his great compassion. This is the fragrance of the Flower of Mankind: the great and unbounded love and compassion for all beings. It is the love that is soothing, sweet, and consoling; it calms the anxious mind and gives hope and confidence to mankind. Like a flower in full bloom, perfect and complete unto itself, the Buddha is perfect, without flaws, whole, supreme.

In the Buddha's compassionate heart there can never appear the flaws of human emotion, anger and selfish desire. The Buddha's mind is perfect in purity and compassion which extend to every being in the universe. When the Buddha speaks, he brings comfort and solace to those who are suffering in the endless cycles of birth and death. His compassion and love are unlimited and extended to all, including those who are not his disciples.

The Buddha does not restrict his compassion to his followers or even to humans, but to all beings regardless of whether they are two-footed, four-footed, feathered or scaled. He radiates his compassion like a flower which gives its fragrance and nectar without bias. He gives peace and comfort without taking anything back in return. His kindness and patience is like a fresh shower of rain which ends a long period of scorching drought. His constant wish is, 'May all beings be well and happy.'

The testimony of the great compassion the Buddha had for suffering humanity, is his great renunciation in which he sacrificed his personal comfort, luxury, security and happiness as a noble prince who was blessed with a beautiful, caring wife and a newborn son, for the sake of suffering beings. He exchanged his pleasure and wealth for a life of homelessness and poverty in order to seek the Truth that can free all beings from suffering. After he found the Truth, he spent the rest of his life teaching others how they too might attain the Truth.

There were none who were too poor or lowly for his compassion. The Buddha went in search of the poor, the ignorant and the vicious, while the good and virtuous came to pay homage and to listen to him. He showered his great compassion on the courtesan, **Ambapali**, the notorious robber, **Angulimala** and the sorely distracted **Kisagotami**. Their minds were converted and they were transformed in their characters. Even to **Devadatta**, who tried to kill him thrice, not an angry word or a curse ever escaped from his lips.

His Great Purity

Buddhahood or Enlightenment is not confined to any particular person. It is open to all who develop great virtues to perfection. A Buddha is utterly pure: he harbours no hatred, anger, greed, jealousy, anxiety, fear and all other frailties of the human heart and mind. Naturally, for a person to attain Buddhahood, he must make the cultivation of the 'Ten Transcendental Virtues' (**Dasa Paramitta**) his total life devotion. These virtues are cultivated from life to life up to the pinnacle of spiritual perfection. Effort and time are needed to remove the mental habits and defilements deeply entrenched in the mind, which have been accumulated over innumerable lives in one's wandering through **Samsara**.

Buddhists believe that in every living being lies hidden the **Buddha-seed** or **Buddha-nature** waiting to ripen. That means, in every person there exists the potential to become pure like the Buddha. To blossom spiritually into a Buddha, one has to act with great determination, compassion, conviction and understanding to cultivate the ten great virtues and completely remove all defilements from the mind. One has, therefore, to use right effort and be guided by a noble vision and steadfast devotion to become a Buddha: One does not become a Buddha by mere prayers, worship or pious offerings to a supernatural being.

Professor Max Muller, a German scholar, noted that the Buddha was the embodiment of all the virtues he preached. His moral code is the most perfect the world has ever

known. During his successful and eventful forty-five years as a supremely enlightened teacher, he translated all his work into essence and in no place did he give vent to any human frailty or any base passion.

The approach adopted by the Buddha towards other religions depicts his liberal and rational attitude and the absence of greed in his mind for power, recognition, or followers. When he was asked for his views on the teachings of others, never once did he ridicule them. Never did he claim that the followers of other religion would go to hell, much less did he condemn non-followers to eternal damnation. The use of reason and kindly persuasion rather than the threat of hell fire was his method of sharing the Dhamma.

One day a well - known personality who was a follower of another religion approached the Buddha with a few questions. After listening to the Buddha, he was convinced of the truth in the Master's words. Deeply inspired and moved, he very quickly expressed his desire to follow the teachings. The Buddha advised him not to be impulsive in accepting the teachings. The Buddha advised him instead to use his reason and investigate into the truth of the teachings before finally deciding to change his religion. The Buddha in fact asked him thrice if he was really sure he wanted to change his religion, and each time he said, 'Yes!' This story illustrates the liberal and rational attitude of the Buddha which is unmatched by any religious teacher before or after him. When asked if one should support the religious teachers of other faiths, he replied that it is an act of merit if we support anyone who is sincere even if he belongs to another faith.

The Buddha as a Liberator

The Buddha was born a human being, but after Enlightenment he lived and taught as a Buddha. He was an extraordinary man. His great qualities of purity, wisdom and compassion inspired the thoughts and actions of millions, and he is highly venerated by his followers. But even then, he did not claim any divinity for himself.

Gotama Buddha truly belongs among the great liberators of mankind. Prometheus, braved the wrath of the gods in order to free man from useless drudgery. Socrates, traced the unsatisfactoriness of life to the fact that men have little knowledge and much misinformation about themselves. Jesus, carried out a passionate probing beneath the surface of events in search of the cause of human existence. Lincoln, tried to abolish slavery and protested against the evils of racial discrimination that enslaved people to their social strata and advocated equal opportunities for all.

Freud wanted to free man's mind from the compulsive ego which distorts every urge to happiness. Wittgenstein wished to warn man about the mystification of the human intellect by conventional language. John Stuart Mill saw that man is not so much enslaved by tyrants sitting on thrones as the subtle persuasions that lie within his untrained mind that deprive him of his integrity and independence and Gandhi overthrew the shackles of colonialism through non-violence. However, the Buddha's Enlightenment, great compassion and perfection are far superior to that of any great man who has ever appeared on this earth.

According to the Buddha, man's present life is a bondage. He is caught in the passions of craving and aversion which is the source of his inner conflict. Unless he removes his craving through moral conduct and mental culture, he will not be in harmony with his fellow human beings and the universe at large. Until he has successfully transformed himself with love and wisdom, all his splendid search for freedom and justice will only

remain as empty dreams. The Buddha does not offer man the vision of a new society in which he will be free. Freedom is won in the light of wisdom, which removes the fog of illusion and ignorance.

The Buddha as a Reformer.

The Buddha is one of the great reformers of human history. He refused to promote mystical, occult and secret doctrines. He exposed the emptiness and futility of performing rites and rituals as a means of gaining salvation. He taught that people should not be bound to a Holy Book or to Sacred Ritual in the search for Truth and to gain spiritual liberation.

The Buddha shook the foundations of many a organised religions of his day. First, he exposed the pretensions of sacred ceremony and myth; second, he pointed out that craving and self-motivation in the mind are too strong to be dislodged by the pattern of worship; third, the love of self is greater than the love of any other thing, including that of a god, deva or Brahma; and fourth, until man has freed himself from the emotional bonds and worldly distractions within his own mind through the application of the Dhamma, he will not be able to experience the unspeakable and unspoken richness that lies within himself.

The Buddha proclaimed to the world the immense potential and the invincible power of the human mind. Instead of placing man in a subservient position to some conception or personification of a divine power, he showed how man can attain the highest knowledge and supreme enlightenment by his own efforts. He raised the worth of man by showing how one can develop one's potential and attain Buddhahood without depending on external forces. Anyone who strives for the highest ideal of Buddhahood must cultivate his or her positive qualities as well as completely remove all defilements from his mind. The goal of Buddhahood is attained through spiritual maturity and not through mere prayers, worship or making offerings to a supernatural being. One should cultivate the good qualities of charity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, determination, goodwill and equanimity. Some of these qualities will take more than one lifetime to cultivate. Effort is needed to purify the mind from the deeply- rooted negative mental habits and defilements. To become a Buddha, one has to work against tremendous odds and rise above the muddy waters of hatred, greed and delusion. One must be like the incomparable lotus that rises from the filth and remain unpolluted and unstained. The Buddha raised the status of down- trodden women and founded the order of nuns for the first time in history. He condemned the sacrifices of animals, and declared that salvation and freedom of suffering is open to all, if they were prepared to walk the path of righteousness. He gave complete freedom of thought to his followers who were encouraged to examine and test out the truth of his words rather than accepting them blindly out of respect for him as a teacher.

In the monastic order that he established, absolute chastity and simplicity in life are adopted so that the members of the order can rise above the bondage of physical drives and the egoistic limitations of family and property. By respecting the life and property of others, they signified that they were not anti-social. If they gave up the worldly life of social and economic relations, it was only for the fuller search of Truth, which rises above bodily appetites and egoism. They sought to transcend, not disrupt, social life. After having abandoned secular society, they entered into a new society based on spiritual relations. Throughout the centuries, the Order of the Sangha kept alive the teachings and provided conditions far more conducive for the development of human potential and the coquets of suffering.

The Buddha's Message of Hope

The Buddha's teaching holds out hope for mankind by offering a way out of suffering and bondage into spiritual liberation known as **Nibbana**. This is the ultimate fact of life and the highest attainment open to mankind. **Nibbana** transcends even the heavens or celestial worlds of the **gods** and **Brahma**. Although these heavenly worlds are more beautiful and have a greater degree of "happiness" than earthly existence, these realms of existence are very much in **Samsara**, and are hence impermanent and still unsatisfactory. **Nibbana** goes beyond these worlds of relative existence: it is the unconditioned state of ultimate peace. And in showing how man can attain it, the Buddha conferred upon human nature the highest honor ever paid by anyone.

The Buddha concentrated deeply on pain and suffering endured by all beings. After gaining Enlightenment and with profound compassion for suffering beings, he dedicated the rest of his life to expounding the Four Noble Truths, a system which examines suffering, its causes, as well as its cure. Buddhism is more delicately aware of this universal aspect of human existence than any other ethic-religious system in the world. Throughout his mission, the Buddha carefully guided countless numbers of people in conquering their craving and selfishness so that they were able to gain final liberation. The voluminous **Tripitaka**, the collection of his teachings and instructions, contain an astounding amount of analysis and prescriptions given by the Master which could be applied to overcome and cure all universal problems. In applying the method prescribed, it is possible for a person to find complete release from an undending existence of unsatisfactoriness.

The Buddha's Message for Mankind

What meaning has the Enlightenment of the Buddha for us? Firstly, the Buddha made us realise our true potential for Enlightenment, that is, our Buddha nature. He dispelled the darkness of ignorance and encouraged us to develop our wisdom to the fullest. Through the practice of Dhamma, we can develop spiritual insights into the real nature of things and, hence, be no longer enslaved by delusion and selfish motivations in the mind. He gives full credit to human intelligence and urges us to awaken the vast potential for spiritual growth and transformation that lie hidden in everyone of us. The great human tragedy is our failure to realise the vast potential. As a result of not realising it people condemn themselves to developing only a minute part of what they are really able to achieve. We are like the farmer who lives in a miserable life not realising that there is a pot of gold hidden in his field. Through spiritual cultivation, we can cast away our self-imposed limitations and be completely liberated.

Secondly, the Buddha opens the gate to liberation to all without discrimination. Caste, class, race, sex, or religious labels meant little to him. All can benefit from the Dhamma if we strive diligently to cultivate various virtues, self-discipline and the mind. The Dhamma is like a wondrous herb that heals the sick, regardless of their labels or social, cultural or political affiliations.

Thirdly, the Buddha shows the Enlightenment and release from suffering is possible without depending on external factors, such as prayers, offerings religious rites and rituals, and animal sacrifices to gain purity and liberation. We have the capacity to save ourselves if we can be made to realise this fact shown the way how to do it. But does this mean that we should go on our spiritual journey alone? There is great value in associating with like-minded people who share similar ideals of self-purification. Spiritual friendship, according to the Buddha, is an important condition for our progress and

development. The emphasis on self reliance for spiritual development however, is still valid to ensure that we do not develop a dependent and passive attitude. We must realise the value of practicing the Dhamma ourselves and take the trouble to develop positive qualities of the heart and mind. So long as we do not want to do this, our scope for spiritual growth remains constrained.

And finally, the Buddha has given us a spiritual vision – the vision of self- fulfillment and enlightenment. He is the spiritual ideal for us to emulate, and we can always be inspired by his noble example. Had he claimed that he was a divine being, then we may think that our scope for following his example is rather limited. But he was born a human being and through his own effort emerged as the Enlightened One. Therefore, we know that the goal of liberation is not something remote, but one which is possible and attainable, given the right method and the correct application of human effort.

Truly, the Buddha is the Flower of Mankind. Like the gentle fragrance of sweet jasmine carried for a brief moment by the gentle breeze on a still moonlit night, the Buddha's message has spread throughout the world. It has spread without the use of political might, the enticing lure of miraculous powers or the manipulative use of financial aid to gain converts.

A Truly Great Man

Professor Lakshmi Narasu, in his book **Essence of Buddhism**, mentioned that among the founders of religions, the Buddha occupies a prominent place. His dignified bearing, his high intellectual endowment, his penetrating glance, his oratorical power, his firmness of conviction, his gentleness, kindness and liberality and his attractiveness of character all testify to his greatness.

If the worth of a truly great man consists in his efforts to raise the dignity and self-respect of all mankind, who is better entitled to be called truly great than the Buddha? He is one who, instead of degrading man by placing another being over him, has exalted man to the highest pinnacle of wisdom and compassion. His figure is the noblest, the most perfect that man has ever attained. His inspiring teaching was genius unequalled amongst men.

Dr Radhakrishnan, a well-known Indian scholar and the former President of India, had his highest respect for the Flower of Mankind. He said, 'In Gautama the Buddha, we have a master mind from the East, second to none so far as the influence on the thought and life of the human race is concerned, and sacred to all as the founder of a religious tradition whose hold is hardly less wide and deep than any other. He belongs to the history of the world's thought, to the general inheritance of all cultivated men; for, judged by intellectual integrity, moral earnestness, and spiritual insight, he is undoubtedly the greatest human being who has ever lived.

The Voice of the Buddha

More than 2500 years ago, a great prince, dressed in the simplest of saffron robes gained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Buddha Gaya, India. His soft and melodious voice announced the Ultimate Truth of the first time in Isipatana Deer Park, Benares. On that momentous occasion there were only five disciples privileged to listen to the voice of this Enlightened One. Yet, today one fifth of the world's population acknowledges the Truth announced by this Voice and many admire and appreciate it.

This was not the heavenly voice of a divine power, but a very human voice which called on men to seek final emancipation through mental purification and enlightenment. Even today, this voice echoes in our ears and reminds us that we can understand the Truth revealed by Him, if only we exercise our will and our concentration.

The voice of the Buddha is a message of hope, confidence and courage. It tells us that hatred never ceases through hatred but only by loving kindness. This vibrant voice emanated from a great personality, who was once a warrior, a royal prince, a yogi, a mendicant and finally a Buddha.

This holy man whose only possession was the bowl in his hand, was designated the happiest and most contented person in the world. His was the gentlest of all voices. Yet in the Truth that it proclaimed, it was a lion's roar, motivated by the confidence of realising the Absolute Truth.

Kings, ministers and multimillionaires approached Him to pay their homage and seek guidance. But He Himself used His persuasive voice to enlighten sweepers, cobblers, thieves, gangsters, murderers, and many others who were leading hard, wicked, and immoral lives to mend and lead noble lives.

The voice of the Buddha has comforted the bereaved and helped the suffering poor. It has ennobled the lives of the deluded and purified the corrupted lives of criminals. It has encouraged the feeble, united the divided, enlightened the ignorant, elevated the base and dignified the noble.

Here is a voice that never tried to frighten people by talking about hell fires to tempt them by promising everlasting heavenly bliss to introduce a religion. It was a voice that never attempted to convert people, but only to enlighten them to understand the facts of life and the universal truth.

Here was a radiant voice, calling on the weak and the desperate not to run away from the battle of life but to face facts in a realistic way.

It was the Buddha's voice that gave the world a new concept or wider explanation of the universe. It gave a new vision of eternal happiness, the achievement of perfection in Buddhahood. It pointed the way to a permanent state beyond all impermanency, the Way to Nibbana, the final deliverance from the misery of existence. The message is basically simple and meaningful: "To put an end to evil; to do good; to purify the mind."

It revealed to us the law of cause and effect to which every component thing is subjected. The purpose of life is to seek ways and means to be free from this endless cycle of birth and death, cause and effect.

The Teachings of the Buddha are the richest spiritual resources of mankind because they lift human effort to a higher level than mere dedication to man's insatiable needs and appetites. Owing to its completeness, the Buddha's vision of life has attracted the attention of intellectuals who may have otherwise exhausted themselves by studying meaningless theories and concepts. However, the fruit of the Buddha's vision is something more than intellectual gymnastics of solace for the intellectually effete. Buddhism is practical and offers a realistic view of life.

Though the Buddha is no longer in this world, the gentle vibration of His voice has spread far and wide. Its balmy, diffusing effect has calmed and soothed millions. Its genial persuasion has heartened and cheered listeners in every region where it has

penetrated. The reason that His message has captured millions of hearts is because it was spread not by the force of weapons or political power or any other kind of worldly power but by love and compassion. Buddhism wins by the warm hand of love, not by the cold threat of terror.

The voice carried the message that the Four Truths are eternal and absolute. It said that a realisation of these noble Truths will help resolve human problems and unsatisfactoriness. This was the voice which preached the Eightfold Noble Path. It exhorted men to lead a harmless, respectable, honest, peaceful and noble life and to find out the purpose of life or its final goal.

The Buddha's voice admonished people not to harm any living creature. Just imagine – this gentle voice, taught compassion even to poor defenceless animals! The humblest of creatures crawling underground came within the compass of His boundless love and kindness.

The Buddha was the greatest conqueror the world has ever seen. He conquered the world with His infallible weapons of compassion and wisdom. His Teaching illuminates the Way for mankind to cross from a world of darkness, hatred and suffering, to a new world of light, love, happiness and security.

During the 25 centuries since the voice of the Compassionate One was first heard, many changes have taken place in this world. Although Kingdoms have risen and fallen; nations have prospered and perished, and today the world has forgotten many great civilisations, the voice of the Buddha remains clear in the minds of millions of people. The Noble Way of Life that He enunciated is still strong and steady. Many of the temples, pagodas, images and other religious symbols erected in His honour have been destroyed, or fallen victims to the law of change. Yet His Noble Teachings and His pristine message remain untainted and His voice continues to be heard in new lands and among new people.

The Buddha's noble example was a source of inspiration to all. His iron will, profound wisdom, universal love, boundless compassion, selfless service, historic renunciation, perfect purity, and magnetic personality have inspired people to respect Him as a world-honoured Supreme Teacher!

By every test of what He said and of what He did and what He was, the Buddha demonstrated that He was the pre-eminent man of His day. He declared a faith of service, a ministry of sacrifice and achievement.

To great philosophers and unbiased thinkers. He is a Teacher who understood worldly conditions in their proper perspective. To moralists He has the highest code of discipline and He symbolises perfection. To rationalists, He is the most liberal-minded religious teacher who understood the vexed human problems. The free- thinkers, He is a religious teacher who encouraged people to think freely without depending on religious dogmas. To agnostics, He is a very intelligent, kind, understanding, and peace-loving man. To Hindus, He is one of the incarnations of their God. To socialists, He is a social reformer. To religious devotees, He is a holy man.

The benign voice of the Buddha wafted gently over time and space without any form of violence. Not a single drop of blood was shed in its cause. He advised people to lead a gentle life in order to be religious.

The voice of the Compassionate One is still with us, and will continue to be with us, consoling, enlightening, soothing and calming the human heart.

The voice of the Buddha is the most powerful voice that has been heard in human history in support of the dignity of man and of the principle that man is the maker of his own destiny and that man is not for religion but that religion must serve man. That means: without becoming a slave to any religion, man must try to make use of religion for his betterment and liberation.

Instead of placing man's destiny under the arbitrary control of an unknown external agency and making him subservient to such a supreme power, the Dhamma preached by this voice raised the status of mankind and accorded man the credit due to him for his intelligence. Alone among the many voices of other religious teachers this voice taught man how to cultivate the hitherto submerged human potential.

Thanks to this voice, ordinary people are able to develop their faith and confidence, educated people have food for thought, and intellectuals have enriched their vision. Those who were misguided had their views corrected. Those who relied on blind faith have received a clear vision of the Truth. Sceptics were persuaded and won over by the voice of reason. Devotees gained confidence, understanding and liberation from suffering.

This is the **"Voice of Buddhism"**!

THE BUDDHA NATURE

The Buddha cannot be Fathomed

Whose conquest (of passion) is not turned into defeat, no conquered (passion) of his in this world follows him – that trackless Buddha in infinite range, by which way will you lead him?

Buddhas are dear to all

The wise ones who are intent on meditation, who delight in the peace of renunciation (i.e. Nibbana), such mindful perfect Buddhas even the gods hold (most) dear.

The good are rare

Rare is birth as a human being. Hard is the life of mortals. Hard is the hearing of the Sublime Truth. Rare is the appearance of the Buddhas.

Do good and be good

Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind, - this is the Teaching of the Buddhas.

Non – Violence is the characteristic of an ascetic

Forbearing patience is the highest austerity. Nibbana is supreme, say the Buddhas. He, verily, is not a recluse who harms another. Nor is he an ascetic who oppresses others.

Lead a pure and noble life

Not insulting, not harming, restraint according to the Fundamental Moral Code, moderation in food, secluded abode, intent on higher thoughts, - this is the Teaching of the Buddhas.

Insatiate are sensual pleasures

Not by a shower of gold coins does contentment arise in sensual pleasures. Of little sweetness, and painful, are sensual pleasures. Of little sweetness and painful are sensual pleasures. Knowing thus, the wise man finds no delight even in heavenly pleasures. The disciple of the Fully Enlightened One delights in the destruction of craving.

Release from suffering is gained by seeking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha

To many a refuge fear-stricken men betake themselves – to hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines.

Nay, no such refuge is safe, no such refuge is supreme. Not by resorting to such a refuge is one freed from all ill.

He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, sees with right knowledge the Four Noble Truths – Sorrow, the Cause of Sorrow, the Transcending of Sorrow and the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to the Cessation of Sorrow.

This, indeed, is refuge secure. This, indeed, is refuge supreme. By seeking such refuge one is released from all sorrow.

The noble are rare

Hard to find is a man of great wisdom: such a man is not born everywhere. Where such a wise man is born, that family thrives happily.

Things that tend to happiness

Happy is the birth of Buddhas. Happy is the teaching of sublime Dhamma. Happy is the unity of the Sangha. Happy is the discipline of the united ones.

Honour to whom honour is due

He who reverences those worthy of reverence, whether Buddhas or their disciples; those who have overcome the impediments and have got rid of grief and lamentation, - the merit of him who reverences such peaceful and fearless Ones cannot be measured by anyone as such and such.

Dhammapada
(Buddha Vagga)