

# Ideals of Religious Life in Buddhism

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## Abstract

Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) was born in around the year 560 BC in the sacred area of Lumbini near the ancient town of Kapilabastu in Terai region of Southern Nepal. He was the only son of King Suddhodana and Queen Mahamaya and the only heir to the Sakya kingdom. He was brought up in Kapilabastu by his step mother, the second wife of Suddhodana, as his mother Mahamaya died after seventh day of his birth. From his very childhood he seemed to have no attraction towards his princely life and was always found in a pensive and despondent mood. He would rise early in the morning, performed his morning activities and took his bath. Then he would go a solitary place for the practice of contemplation. His father tried his best to keep him away from these by marrying him and surrounding him with luxuries. He married at the age of 16 with his cousin, Yasodhara, and a son, Rahul, was born.

**Keywords:** Mother, Place, Society, Princely, Pleasure, Walking

One day Siddhartha Gautam while he was walking outside his palace, Siddhartha Gautam was impressed with grief at the sight of old person, sick person and death. After seeing these three events he renounced his princely pleasure and ventured forth in search of the truth. Thus, Siddhartha Gautama left home and adopted an ascetic's life. At the age of twenty-nine, he made this great renunciation. With his five faithful friends Siddhartha Gautama went to a solitary place in the jungles of Uruvela and these gave himself up to fasting and other bodily mortification of the most type, seeking peace of soul through the favour of asceticism. But he could not gain any solace from it, for the truth was as far off ever.

Siddhartha Gautama became convinced of the futility of the method after practicing full six years of intense ascetic discipline. The wisdom of the schools, the austerity of asceticism and the

emptiness were all weighed in the balance and found wanting. Then Gautama began a fresh course of self-discipline characterized by less severity. From this reason his companions became dissenting and left him. After Siddhartha Gautama began to seat under the banyan tree (famous Bo-tree) near Gaya, facing the east, steadfast and unstirred, with his mind fixed to purpose that he would not stir from the seat until he attained supreme and absolute wisdom. He was deeply absorbed in meditation and determined to achieve his purpose. After remaining seven weeks under the banyan tree, in one of his deeply meditative moods, a new light broke upon his mind and he became fully enlightened (Buddha). Then he found the causes of suffering and means of removing them. Obtaining

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this knowledge he was known as “Buddha”. This knowledge is comprehended in Four Noble Truth. The four noble truths are:

1. Life is full of suffering.
2. There is a cause of this suffering.
3. This suffering can be stopped.
4. There is a way which leads to the cessation of suffering.

## DISCUSSION

After obtaining this knowledge, he decided to teach the way to it to others also. His first five disciples who had earlier parted from him, and were at that time in a place known as Saranatha, near Varanasi. Buddha preached them the gospel of Four Noble Truths. Thousands of peoples enrolled themselves among his adherents.

Primarily Buddha was an ethical teacher and reformer. He looked at life and the world around us and he saw that life is full of sorrows and sufferings. He was more interested in solving the problem of human miseries but he did not encourage metaphysical speculations. Thus, Buddha laid more importance to the solution of problems which were intimately related to human life. Buddha avoided the discussion of metaphysical questions as to whether the soul was different from the body, whether the soul survived after the death of the body, whether the world was finite or infinite, eternal or non-eternal. According to him such type of discussion relating to the metaphysical questions is futile, because there is no sufficient ground for the solution of them, and because these insufficient grounds lead to partial and conflicting views. Such conflicting views occur one-sided accounts of an elephant given by different parts of the elephant. For example, the man who caught the ear of the elephant thought that the elephant is like a winnowing fan, the holder of the leg imagined that it is like a big round pillar. In such conflicting views, Buddha repeatedly pointed out that such speculations based on insufficient evidence should be avoided, because these do not reach nearer to the goal.

Buddha mentions ten questions as uncertain and ethically unprofitable. These questions are:

1. Is the world eternal?

2. Is the world non-eternal?
3. Is the world finite?
4. Is the world infinite?
5. Is the soul the same as the body?
6. Is the soul different from the body?
7. Does one who has known the truth live again after death?
8. Does he not live again after death ?
9. Does he both live again and not –live again after death?
10. Does he neither live nor not- live again death?

These ten metaphysical questions are known as “indeterminate questions” in Buddhist literature. Buddha, instead of discussing such metaphysical questions, tried to enlighten persons on the most important questions of sorrow, its origin, its cessation and the means of removing the sorrows.

In this way, Buddha has propounded the Four Noble Truths which are the way to remove or stop the sufferings from mankind. They are:

1. Life is full of suffering. (*dukha*).
2. There is a cause of this suffering. (*dukha-samodaya*)
3. This suffering can be stopped. (*dukha-nirodha*)
4. There is a way which leads to the cessation of suffering. (*dukha-nirodha-marga*)

The Buddhist morality is altruistic. Though Nirvana is the highest good of an individual, it is realized through universal good-will and love. We should pervade the whole world with love, pity, sympathy, and equanimity. Universal love, compassion for the distressed, joy for the virtuous, and indifference to the vicious are enjoyed. Love generates compassion, joy and indifference, and is consequently higher than these. So the Buddhist ethics is altruistic.

The ethics of non-injury (*ahimsa*) is the keynote of Buddhism. Hatred should be conquered by love; harm should be conquered by good. Evil recoils upon one who offends a harmless, pure, and innocent person. A blow incites a blow. Patience is the highest virtue. We should be tolerant with the intolerant, mild with fault-finders, free from passion among the passionate. We should not offend anyone by body, word, or thought. A man is not just, if he carries a matter by violence; he is just, if he leads

others, not by violence, by law and equity. Non-injury, in thought, word, and deed, love, good-will, patience, endurance, and self-purification constitute the Buddhist morality.

Buddhist morality is the mean between self-indulgence and self-torture which proved fruitless. Self-torture emaciates the body and fills the mind with evil thoughts. If the fires of lust, hatred, and delusion are not quenched, self-mortification can lead us nowhere. Craving for pleasure springs from egoism. When egoism is rooted out, craving for worldly and heavenly pleasures is quenched. On the other hand, self-indulgence is enervating and degrading. But to satisfy hunger and thirst, to keep the body in good health, to protect it from heat and cold, to save it from fatigue, to cover it comfortably and decently are necessary to keep the mind strong and pure. This is the Middle Path that avoids both extremes. The *Dharma* spurns both pursuits of pleasures and self-mortification. It aims at purity of heart, purity of conduct, equanimity, peace, and enlightenment.

The eight-fold path embodies the ethics and morality of Buddhism all of which are universal in character and application. Together with the eightfold path go to the four radiations of Brahma Viharas which are to be assiduously practiced by an aspirant to Buddhism. They are :

1. Loving kindness, always and everywhere (*Maitzaya*)
2. Boundless compassion, always and everywhere (*Barma*)
3. Boundless joy, always and everywhere (*Mudita*)
4. Boundless equanimity, always and everywhere (*Upeksha*)

Along with these are also the five precepts (*Panchsheela*) which everyone is advised to adhere strictly.

They are :

- (A) Abstention from destroying life.
- (B) Non covetousness.
- (C) Chastity.
- (D) Abstention from lying and deceiving.
- (E) Abstention from intoxicants.

The practice of the eightfold path and its adjuncts lead one to wisdom by which one attains the complete extinction of suffering.

The Buddha *Dharma* lays very great stress on what is known as the Law of Karma or in the language of science as the law of cause and effect. Each man is himself responsible for what he has been, what he is and what he will be.

This *Dharma* as the way of wolf culture. It recognizes no case or creed but lays stress on universal benevolence even to lower creatures. It possesses the first organized monastic system in the world including even women and aspirants from all classes, castes and creeds.

Although Buddhism generally varied from age to age and from country to country, yet the basic principles of the *Dharma* have always been constantly held by all Buddhists, irrespective of country or age.

The two outstanding doctrines of the Buddha *Dharma* are that of compassion and wisdom which is the same as enlightenment. The first doctrine when put into practice, as testified by the earlier history of Buddha, leads to the cessation of all strife and hatred, Individual and collective and to an era of universal peace and happiness through practical social welfare and humanitarian services. This aspect of the *Dharma* is embodied in the *Avalokiteswara* ideal (the Lord who looks below with compassion) of the *Mahayana*.

The second doctrine when put into action promotes culture and enlightenment, individually and collectively. The earlier history of Buddhism also testifies to this fact. The Ashokan period in Asian history bears this point.

Today, the world needs a reaffirmation of the noble message of the Buddha *Dharma*, the ultimate purpose of which is the attainment of enlightenment, happiness and peace for oneself and for all creations.

Thus, it can be told here that Gautama Buddha was primarily an ethical teacher and reformer, not a metaphysician. The message of his enlightenment points to man the way of life that leads beyond suffering.

## CONCLUSION

Buddha was an ethical teacher and reformer. He looked at life and the world around us and he saw that life is full of sorrows and sufferings. He was

more interested in solving the problem of human miseries but he did not encourage metaphysical speculations. Thus, Buddha laid more importance to the solution of problems which were intimately related to human life. Buddha avoided the discussion of metaphysical questions as to whether the soul was different from the body, whether the soul survived after the death of the body, whether the world was finite or infinite, eternal or non-eternal

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