

# WHY BUDDHISM



Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda



For 80 years,  
we have been providing quality  
Buddhist education to adults & children ....

**FREE OF CHARGE**



Millions have benefitted from the selfless dedication of our Sangha, volunteer teachers & friends of the Vihara obtaining Buddhist education, free publications, counselling, blessings, welfare assistance, etc

**Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society**

佛陀教义弘扬协会

Buddhist Maha Vihara  
123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields,  
50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

## Publication of the



### **Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society**

佛陀教义弘扬协会

Buddhist Maha Vihara,  
123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields,  
50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Tel: 603-22741141 Fax: 603-22732570  
E-Mail: [info@buddhistmahavihara.com](mailto:info@buddhistmahavihara.com)  
Website: [www.buddhistmahavihara.com](http://www.buddhistmahavihara.com)  
[www.ksridhammananda.com](http://www.ksridhammananda.com)

Published for Free Distribution Permission  
to reprint for free distribution can be  
obtained upon request.

1<sup>st</sup> Print – May 2010 (2,500 copies)

**Printed by Uniprints Marketing Sdn. Bhd.** (493024-K)  
(A member of Multimedia Printing & Graphics (M) Sdn Bhd)

ISBN: 983-99523-5-8

## Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I went through the few pages of this wonderful booklet on Buddhism. Almost every sentence of it illumines the gloomy heart of the Reader. It supplies precise but brief answers mainly to the two questions – Why is there religion? and Why is there Buddhism? The pages prepare a colourful picture of Buddhism in its natural colours, and the picture is more than a painted one that depicts the imagination of the artist. The more times the reader reads it the more new things appear before his inquisitive mind. The thoughts are well balanced and full of truth. The long experience of the author as the Chief Buddhist High Priest of Malaysia, and his long scholarly and pious life as Buddhist monk of great repute are the well earned qualifications to write such a useful and instructive booklet in such a brief way. The question ‘Why Buddhism?’ is here well answered.

**Dikwela Piyananda**, M.A., Ph. D.  
Buddhist Vihara,  
5017, 16th Street, N.W.,  
Washington, D.C. 20011, U.S.A.

## **Foundation of Religions**

**B**efore we discuss the subject "Why Buddhism", we must find out how man's idea of religion got started in the first place.

Thousands of years ago when primitive man's mind started thinking about various kinds of natural phenomena in this world, he found many wonderful experiences. When certain natural forces or phenomena were not in his favour he had to suffer. He witnessed disasters and terrible incidents which created fear, suspicion, insecurity, tension and suffering. Then he started thinking how to find a solution and rid his life of these unfavourable conditions. But he knew that these things were beyond his comprehension. He therefore imagined there must be some sort of invisible powers, supernatural forces or persons behind all these things. He started to pray and worship these imagined powers. He began to make animal sacrifices in order to appease the

## 2 Why Buddhism?

wrathful forces. He gave thanks when certain phenomena appeared in his favour, assuming they were acts of gods. The aim, then, of these practices was to gain protection and be blessed with a life of prosperity and little difficulty. This is how religious belief and practice got started and why primitive man started to pray. As this early concept of religion began to develop, other certain important practices were also incorporated, such as religious rites and rituals, ceremonies and festivals. These evolved naturally according to the particular customs, traditions and ways of life prevalent in the respective regions and countries.

The foundation of religion was thus laid down by man as a means to assure his self-preservation in response to his fundamental fear, insecurity and misunderstanding of the natural phenomena of life. It is human fear then which served as the building blocks of religion. These served not only as the foundation of all religions, but as the basic materials like bricks, stone, sand and cement needed for erecting the building.

It was with the introduction of faith, however, which allowed for the building called religion to be completed. Faith together

with the introduction of offerings, prayers, vows, penalties, morals and ethics – all in the name of god. There was also the promise of a place of eternal peace called paradise in order to control mankind.

### **The Foundation of Buddhism**

Later, when we study how another religion called Buddhism came into existence, we find that the Buddha did not adopt any of those age old beliefs. He did not introduce the concept of god, soul theory, eternal hell or eternal heaven to build up Buddhism. He made no use of fear or distorted views regarding natural phenomena to support his religion. Neither did he ask for blind faith or demand unnecessary rites and rituals. He did not believe in self-torture, or the imposition of penalties or commandments in the building up of Buddhism. What is more, He sought no sort of divine revelation. He used new materials such as Right Understanding of life, the world, the occurrence of natural phenomena or cosmic order, the real characteristics of mind and matter, elements and energies, the acquisition of moral and

## **4 Why Buddhism?**

spiritual development, discipline, mental training and purification, knowledge, wisdom and enlightenment, as ingredients to erect this religious building. It is true that He borrowed certain religious materials used by other religionists of that time such as Dharma – righteous way of life, Karma – action and reaction, Punabbawa – rebirth, and certain moral principles, but not in the same manner or in the same sense. He in fact refined them and introduced them in a more rational, scientific and psychological way.

### **An Independent Religion**

Buddhism is not an eclectic concoction of various religions. It has its own unique characteristics and identity. Realising that no other religious teacher had found the absolute truth and final salvation of man, The Buddha pointed out that others had only developed certain worldly powers and could only attain certain limited stages of spiritual development and not the complete purification of the mind, or enlightenment. These teachers were thus not free from superstitious belief, impurity, illusion, imagina-



tion, hallucination and ignorance. But what does religion really mean?

The real meaning of religion can only be grasped when we study the way which the Buddha introduced his "religious way of noble life." If we use the word "religion" to describe the Buddha's teachings, then we must understand the different definitions given to this word by other religionists. Then we can understand why Buddhism is needed.

### **No Dogmas**

The Buddha managed to remove certain misconceptions that were held by people for thousands of years. For example, in those early days everyone believed that the sun rotated daily round the earth. People held this belief because they lacked proper knowledge of our solar system. But when Nicolaus Copernicus, the Polish astronomer discovered and proved that the sun was in fact located at the centre of our solar system, only then did people grasp the truth of his theory and slowly give up their former belief.

There was another misconception people held about the earth. For thousands of years

## 6 Why Buddhism?

people believed that the earth was flat. Then came Galileo the celebrated Italian astronomer and physicist who discovered and proved that the earth was not flat at all, but round. But there was also great objection to his theory from the Church. Galileo was summoned before the Inquisition and forced to recant under threat of torture and sentenced to prison. Only later did people come to accept this truth.

Even up to the 19th Century, philosophers generally believed that the atom was the essential entity of matter which was impossible to split. But their theory was abandoned when nuclear scientists finally managed to split the atom. Similarly, in ancient India, the belief held by philosophers for thousands of years that the soul was a permanently enduring entity created by God, also had to be given up when the Buddha proved this to be an imaginary concept. This belief, however, still persists in human minds – like the apparently visual reality of a rainbow which in fact has no substantiality. The Buddha explained that the notion of soul is only a misconception in man's consciousness. If indeed there is a soul, would there be any reason for the Buddha to withhold such

knowledge from His followers? Certainly not. Particularly because this concept of soul holds great importance to every other religionists.

The theory of evolution as put forth by Charles Darwin disproved the then popular creation theory that life was created by God. Geology, biology and physiology also explained very clearly that it had taken millions of years for the appearance of the first form of life on this earth. There is no contradiction between these modern findings and a careful study of Buddhism. The discoveries of a gradual development of mineral deposits, plant life and other living beings are fully consistent with the ancient teaching of the Buddha.

To the question of how life came into existence, the Buddha gave a simple and reasonable answer. He said, life is only a combination of mind and matter. He defined the mind as being composed of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. He analysed matter into four elements; solidity, fluidity, heat and motion.

When we study the logical explanation of the Buddha as concerns the question of the Cosmos, we find that He mentions the existence of certain living beings, both

## 8 Why Buddhism?

fortunate and unfortunate, not only in this world but on certain other planets as well.

Modern scientists and astronomers have been open minded and concede the possibility of living beings existing on other planets.

Many ancient and traditional religious beliefs are exactly like the the old pre-scientific beliefs about the world system and the origin of life. Yet the Buddha's teachings – though belonging to the ancient period – are akin to the modern discoveries. The Buddha's chief aim was to liberate humanity from the bonds of religious slavery. His social impact was also great. He sought to upgrade the status of women by giving them freedom to enter the holy order. In another sweeping change the Buddha abolished the existing bars on so-called low caste people by ordaining them as full-fledged monks.

The prevalent belief that the performance of religious rites and rituals was a mandatory practices for man to achieve salvation was dispelled by the Buddha. According to Him, the development of morality and the purification of the mind are the most important points in gaining one's final salvation. He pointed out that for a man to be religious he

must lead a harmless, blameless, respectable, noble and pure life. The mere act of praying or making offerings does not by itself make a man religious nor gain him perfection and salvation.

He also advised people to keep away from evil practices. Evil is to be avoided for the welfare of all living beings, not for fear of god or his punishment. Further, He advised us to cultivate good humane qualities, to practise good deeds and help others without any selfish motive.

The Buddha was apparently the only religious teacher who gave highest credit to human intelligence. He advised us not to become slaves to external agencies but to develop our hidden mental power with self-confidence.

He also pointed out that man is responsible for everything in this world. Pain and pleasure are both created by man himself, and man has the ability to get rid of his sufferings. Man can learn to maintain peace and happiness by applying wisdom diligently without depending on external powers. It is man's untrained mind that is responsible for all the troubles, calamities, disturbances, unfavourable circumstances

## **10 Why Buddhism?**

and frictions. At the same time, man's mind can transform the unfortunate situation of the world and render it a peaceful, prosperous and happy place for all to live – if only he uses his mind properly. Man-made problems must be solved by man himself. This can only be done by purifying his mental energy.

### **Facing the Facts**

Buddhism is a religion which always encourages man to face the facts of life without depending on imaginary concepts, and to accept the truth wherever it may be. Therefore, Buddhists do not reject the facts pertaining to worldly matters as discovered by great thinkers and scientists. Although the Buddha paid more attention to spiritual development, He never neglected man's worldly progress. His teachings give some sound and practical advice on how to work properly without wasting valuable time and effort, and how to act wisely for the progress of mankind. He said that man should fulfil his duties towards his family, relatives, friends, community, county and the whole

world. Therefore Buddhists should not ignore their obligation to make this world more happy and peaceful by contributing their share within their capacity. He never interfered with the affairs of government or with reasonable laws imposed by government. He was not against social customs and traditions so long as they were harmless and useful to society.

It must also be said that the Buddha never sought personal political or military power in order to introduce his spiritual way of life, though kings and the ministers were among His many followers.

Here we have a religious way of life which teaches us to care for others, to sacrifice our own comfort for the sake of suffering humanity. It asks us to observe religious precepts or disciplines voluntarily, not as commandments imposed on us by some unseen beings. By observing such good principles according to our own convictions, we get the chance to perfect ourselves and also help others live in peace.

Such perfection is the highest goal which a person must attain before gaining his salvation. It cannot be obtained through the influence of any God.

## **12 Why Buddhism?**

### **Come and See the Results Immediately**

According to this religion we can see the results of most of our good and bad actions within this very life time. Heavenly bliss or Nirvanic bliss can also be experienced within this very life time. You don't have to wait until you die.

This is why the Buddha always welcomed people to come and observe His way of teaching; not to come and believe it all at once. He actually advised people on how to choose a proper religion, by considering, analysing and investigating it in various ways without accepting anything through emotion or blind faith. Of course all religions promote faith. But faith in Buddhism is not a surrender to the unknown; it is not submission to fear and punishment. Buddhist faith is the courageous acceptance of what one has found out through careful observation and analytical investigation. This is why Buddhism is called a doctrine of analysis. This religion contains a profoundly scientific and psychological analysis of mind and matter which many great modern thinkers have admired.



## Universal Laws

To those who talked about the first cause of this world, the Buddha responded by saying that it is impossible to find a first cause since everything is changing, interdependent and conditioned by other things. Something that acts as the cause in the present may become the effect in the future. Later that same effect may again become the cause. Such phenomenon continues *ad infinitum*. It is called the universal law of *Anicca* or impermanency.

With regard to the origin of the world itself, the Buddha did not claim it was the property of Buddhism or that existing world systems and living things were controlled according to the Buddhist Order, but by universal law or natural phenomenon. Man was simply to accept his position in the world and regard himself and all things, animate and inanimate, as a compound. According to the scholar Dr. Rhys Davids, "in each individual, without any exception, the relation of its component parts to one another is ever changing, so that it is never the same for two consecutive moments. It follows that no sooner has separateness begun than dis-

## 14 The Purpose of Life and Human Dignity

solution, disintegration, also begins; there can be no individuality without a putting together; there can be no putting together without a becoming; there can be no becoming without a becoming different; and there can be no becoming different without dissolution, a passing away, which sooner or later will become inevitably complete."

The Buddha was the teacher who discovered the real nature of the universal cosmic law and who advised people to live in accordance with this law. He mentioned that those who violate this law, such as going against nature, and leading an immoral life, must be ready to face the consequences. It is impossible to escape from the reactions of such cosmic laws simply by praying to god, because this universal law is unbiased. Yet the Buddha taught us how to stop the reactions of certain bad practices by doing more and more good deeds, by training the mind and eradicating evil thoughts from the mind. After violating the cosmic order or the universal law there is no other method to get rid of the reaction except by co-operating and conforming with the same cosmic law.

## **Mental Energy**

The theory of Karma that the Buddha has explained is accepted by the world-famous Swiss psychologist Carl Jung as "collective consciousness". This is nothing but the depository of karmic seeds in mental energy. As long as the collective consciousness and the "will to live" remain in the mind, as mentioned by the philosophers, rebirth will take place whether people believe it or not. The elements of the body may disintegrate but the mental current together with the "will to live" will be transmitted and another life will be conditioned according to that collective consciousness or Karma.

Gravitation and the law of conservation of energy as discovered by the modern scientists like Newton, support the doctrine of Karma, or action and reaction as introduced by the Buddha.

## **Man Can Become God**

Buddhism upholds the view that man is the supreme being. He surpasses even the

## 16 Why Buddhism?

*devas* (gods) in wisdom and strength. The Bodhisatta left heaven and descended to this world in order to attain His Enlightenment. Why? Because gods have neither the purity nor the intelligence to achieve such high development as Enlightenment. Such status can only be gained by man.

Buddhism gives pride of place to man who lives in human society. The uniqueness of man among other living beings is well recognised. The ability to adapt to new situations and control the environment are well within man's capabilities. The Buddha gave due recognition to the moral and intellectual development of man and further showed the path to its fulfilment. Human birth is not a mere chance of accident. The very existence of man is due to his own karmic results. Thus Buddhism recognises the importance of human birth. No other living beings possess the quality of rational thinking. Hence the superiority of man is upheld.

The potentialities of man are enormous. The faculty of mind which man possesses can be developed to a very great extent. According to Buddhism, man need not depend on any kind of supernatural being. He himself has the capacity to develop up to the state of

attaining omniscience. The Buddha's analysis on this point was given after his own Enlightenment which he attained without the aid of any external supernatural power.

According to the Buddha man can even become a god if he leads a decent and righteous life irrespective of his religious beliefs. But other religions advise man only to pray to god for blessings. They also preach that only after death can man go to heaven. Yet such a heavenly experience will never grant man the privilege of becoming a god. The Buddha said that humans can experience heavenly bliss within this life if they do not abused their position. Yet the Buddhist concept of god is different from that of other religions.

## **The Nature of the Mind**

The rapid changes of mind and the elements of the body have all been explained in Buddhism. According to the Buddha, with every fraction of a split second of time, mental energy appears and disappears. Biology, physiology and psychology also affirm this "fleeting nature of life" pheno-

## **18 Why Buddhism?**

mena. Therefore life is not static or ready made.

Another noted psychologist, Prof. William James, has talked about the point-moment of consciousness. He explained how consciousness comes into being and passes away in rapid succession. According to the nature that causes the continuous process of mind, as soon as a thought is born, it gives birth to another thought and dies. The thought that is born in turn gives birth to yet another thought and similarly dies, and so on.

As to the question of how evil thoughts originally appear in the mind, the answer can be found in the Buddhist religion. The cause of evil thoughts is man's selfish motives which exist due to craving for existence and sensual pleasure.

### **Everything Is Open**

When we study the life and the teachings of the Buddha we can see that everything is open to everybody. There are no secret doctrines. The events which occurred throughout His whole life were like an open book without any hidden and mystical incidents. In

the eyes of the Buddha, what many people regard as “supernatural powers” are in fact quite natural, only ordinary man cannot understand them. If all component things are subject to the natural laws of change, how can we call them supernatural powers? Even the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and death took place in normal circumstances. He lived as a normal religious teacher.

### **Evolving Life Process**

The Buddha has pointed out the process of evolving from animal life into human status and from human status into divine status – divine life into Brahma status and Brahma life into perfect life. One can also proceed from a noble pure life directly to perfect holy life. The reverse order was also pointed out – that is, descending from human life into animal life.

### **Moderate Way of Life**

All religions follow a course of training in order to groom the ‘inner-self’. The avoidance of extremes in the sphere of self-

## 20 Why Buddhism?

indulgence and self-mortification bear the characteristics of Buddhist grooming. The Middle Way is the avoidance of both extremes, eternalism and annihilation.

The Buddha advised people to follow this middle path in every aspect of their life. But many people have not realised the real meaning and usefulness of this noble middle path. The deeper meaning of this middle path goes beyond the concern with righteous behaviour, avoiding extremes and taking a moderate course in life. The deeper meaning is learning how to use our human sense faculties most effectively, without misuse or abuse. The formation of the senses is for our own protection, as well as the protection of those around us. Then we can all live in safety and peace. All religions teach us to train the 'inner-self'; but unfortunately many people spend their whole life in pursuit of the gratification of their senses and misuse them to satisfy only their desire. Finally, their craving becomes so intense that satisfaction becomes an obsessive pursuit. Many immoral practices, cruel deeds, mental disturbances, nervous breakdowns, unhealthy competition, tensions and unrest, which are very common in our modern society, can



be traced to this discontented mind which habitually misuses the senses. Then the power of the senses gradually starts to decay, and as a result many types of sicknesses affect the human organs. That is how man pays the price for misusing or over-taxing his own senses. If there is too much attachment to sensual pleasure in this world, we have no time to mould and prepare ourselves for our future life or the next world.

### **Gentle Attitude**

The Buddha told that it would be cruel and unfair for us to destroy living being for any purpose; but many other religious teachers have ignored this important sympathetic aspect. Destroying the lives of other living beings is not the only way to deal with their being a nuisance. In fact human beings have become the real nuisance to all the other living beings.

The aim of Buddhism is not to create certain wild imaginations in our mind – it is not to please mere human emotion or indulge in certain worldly desires. The aim of Buddhism is to awaken mankind to the

## **22 Why Buddhism?**

possibility of attaining the highest happiness through a clear understanding of life and nature.

### **Real Nature of Life**

The purpose of life is a very complicated issue since different people give different interpretations. But from the Buddhist point of view, the purpose of life is only to find out a complete solution to the problems of life and attain everlasting happiness. Medical theory, science and technology have yet to discover any remedy for man's mental pain, frustration and dissatisfaction in life. Yet Buddhism offers us a very clear picture by declaring its stark prognosis: Suffering has a cause, and so does Happiness.

### **What is Wisdom?**

From the Buddhist point of view, wisdom is based on right understanding and right thought, the realisation of universal law and the development of insight. Insight means not only to see the truth, but to perceive the

way of complete liberation from the state of unsatisfactoriness in life.

Therefore, real wisdom cannot be found in academic institutions or in the laboratories of scientific research, nor even in a place of religious worship where people go and pray or perform rites and rituals. Wisdom is within the mind itself. When experience, understanding, realisation and purification are complete, this wisdom, comprising of the highest perfection, will arise and be seen. The aim of life is the attainment of this wisdom. Instead of searching into outer space, man should make the effort to explore the space within. Then he could reach his final goal.

Man can overcome the worldly forces which hamper his progress through strengthening and purifying his mind. Then he would reach a supramundane state of happiness where evil forces have no power to function anymore.

### **A Practical Method**

One philosopher holds the opinion that religion contradicts all that man has ever experienced. If this is so, Buddhism does not

## 24 Why Buddhism?

belong to that type of religion, since Buddha has taught us everything from His own experience.

Many philosophers, great thinkers and scientists have only relied on their worldly knowledge and power of intellect. Through the discipline of their minds they have managed to find out many new things. Yet even with such intellectual knowledge it is difficult to understand the real nature of existing phenomena without the purification of one's mind. When we study certain statements made by some scholars we can see some truth in their sayings. But many of their sayings remain as dry philosophy because they have only used their mind with much illusion and concepts. But the Buddha used His brain and heart together as refined intelligence coupled with compassion. Thus he gained the wisdom to understand things in their proper perspective. This is why His teachings never became mere dry philosophical theory, but remain a practical method for solving human problems. Religion is meant for the emancipation of living beings. Therefore all religions must make a concerted effort to fill the gap of human limitation through the

science of spiritual insights and the moral training of the inner-self. Religion and ethics are inseparable.

### **Does Religion Hinder Human Progress?**

Many scientists, great thinkers and philosophers have adopted a hostile attitude towards religion. They say religion hinder the progress of mankind and misleads them by introducing ridiculous, superstitious beliefs and practices which keep people blinded to scientific facts. But when we ascertain how they define religion, we can understand that Buddhism does not belong to those religious groups. Therefore, from the intellectuals' own point of view, Buddhism is clearly a scientific religion and cannot be dismissed on superstitious grounds. What is more, the Buddha revealed not only the man-made truth, but the absolute spiritual truth as well. If indeed there is truth, it will remain forever as truth. If any truth is changeable under any conditions, then it is certainly not the absolute truth. This is why the truth as revealed by the Buddha is called the noble

## **26 Why Buddhism?**

truth – the truth which leads man to be a noble person. There will always remain a noble, righteous way of life which is strong enough to face any intellectual and scientific challenge. In this respect, the Buddha's message is unshakeable. Intellectuals will surely respect to this way of life if they only understand what the Buddha really taught.

Whether religious labels exist or not, the teaching of the Buddha will continue to prevail as a noble way of perfecting life. The essentials of the teaching are set in place. Even with the passing of time, people will not need to change it.

### **A Liberal Religion**

Another important point which the Buddha taught is how to live, work and co-operate with the followers of other religions without disturbing or ridiculing their practices. This liberal and understanding style of religion is very important if we are to live peacefully without religious prejudices, strife and conflicts. The Buddha's message of peace and tolerance is indeed remarkable. Tolerance is a glorious virtue. It is essential

for the peaceful co-existence of different peoples anywhere and any time.

## **A Religion of Freedom**

The freedom that the followers of the Buddha enjoy is commendable. In fact, many Buddhists have not even realised this themselves. We have full freedom to judge and to think for ourselves whether to accept or to reject anything. We are not bound to accept anything in the name of religion, either simply by thinking of the greatness of a particular religious teacher or by thinking that it is our bounden duty to accept the words of holy scriptures or the ways of ancient traditions. Buddhists are at liberty to investigate for themselves and accept or reject any proposition in accordance to their own conviction, based on sensible reason. Buddhists never say that they are forbidden to do this or that. They simply say that they dislike doing something because it creates some troubles, miseries, pain or disturbance amongst the masses. Conversely, they practise certain good deeds not because their religion asks them to do so, but

## 28 Why Buddhism?

because they themselves have come to realise the value and meaning of such good deeds for the welfare of themselves and others.

This is a religion of personal freedom which never restricts the affairs of individuals so long as they are not immoral or harmful. Buddhists are granted full freedom to organise their family affairs in keeping with basic religious principles. For intellectuals as well, this religion is like a gold mine in which to conduct meaningful research on the deeper aspects of psychology, philosophy, science and the universal law. Buddhism holds the greatest wealth for humankind, and the ultimate key to our spiritual development and liberation from unsatisfactoriness and unrest. This is why for more than 2500 years Buddhism has managed to convince the masses in many parts of the world without support of political powers. In the time of the Buddha, people welcomed and invited His teaching as a goodwill message of peace and harmony worthy to be spread around the world. This is why Buddhists have introduced their religion without any difficulty and without resorting to any kind of exploitation or violence.



## **Buddha Preached through His Own Experience**

This is the only religion which explains things based on the human experience, realisation, wisdom and enlightenment of its founder, and never as divine revelation or commandment dictated by a god. It affirms that human problems must be understood by fellow human beings through their own experience and by developing altruistic virtues. Solutions to problems have got to be found through the purification and development of the human mind. It is therefore easy to understand why some people say that Buddhism is not a religion at all, but humanism. Yet humanism is the beginning of every religion. Buddha did not introduce Himself as a supernatural saviour. He did not acknowledge the existence of any saviour. According to Him, only we can save ourselves.

Such an attitude makes Buddhism the least dogmatic of all religions. The Buddha explained the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering, and how to get rid of suffering. He also explained the nature of bliss which people can experience when they free

## **30 Why Buddhism?**

themselves from suffering. External forces cannot bring freedom. Bliss comes only if people work for it.

### **Three Characteristics**

The three characteristics of everything in this universe are clearly explained only in this religion. They are the impermanency of everything, the unsatisfactoriness of everything, and the impersonality or unsubstantiality of everything. This is the most remarkable discovery of the Buddha. But due to the ignorance or limited mental capacity of mankind, very few people can comprehend such a lofty and sublime teaching.

### **Cause of Our Problems**

Another important aspect of this religion is the explanation of the main cause of human problems and sufferings. According to the Buddha, we face the problems of this mundane world due to the strong selfish craving which exists in our minds. He has revealed that there are three kinds of craving

forces in our minds. These are:- craving for existence, craving for worldly or sensual indulgence, and craving for non-existence. These three cravings are responsible for our existence, our rebirth, and all the thousands of other problems and mental disturbances. To understand the profound meaning of Buddha's interpretation, it has to be considered very carefully and wisely. Only then can realisation come.

World famous philosophers and psychologists have also explained these three forces, but they used different terms. The German writer Arthur Schopenhauer explained these three forces as sexuality, self-preservation and suicide. The Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud explained these same things as libido, ego instinct and death instinct. It was Freud's famed student Carl Jung who said, "From the sources of instinct spring forth everything creative". This is the way great intellectuals are prepared to support the truth revealed by the Buddha twenty-five centuries ago. But when we study the explanations of these modern thinkers we can see that the Buddha went far beyond their limited understanding capacity.

## 32 Why Buddhism?

### **The Cause of Suffering: Questions and Answers**

It is evident that the world is full of various kinds of sufferings such as death, decay, sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, etc. The Buddha pointed out that birth (*jati*) brings forth sufferings. If there is no birth, there is no scope for suffering.

Q: Why is there birth?

A: The sub-conscious process of becoming as a combination of mind and body (*Nama-rupa*) (*bhava*) causes birth. In other words, where there is *bhava*, there is birth.

Q: What leads to the formation of the combination of body and mind?

A: Thoughts grasped by *Tanĥa* or craving (*upadana*) lead to the formation of Karmic tendencies and lead to the mind-body combination.

Q: What leads to clinging?

A: Craving (*tanĥa*) leads to clinging.

Q: What produces craving?

A: Craving is produced by sensations or feeling (*vedana*).

Q: What generates feeling?

A: It is the contact (of the senses with their objects) which generates feeling.

Q: Why is there such contact?

A: The six sense-bases (*salayatana*) are the causes of contact.

Q: How do the six sense-bases come into being?

A: Psycho-physical combinations (*nama-rupa*) brings forth the six sense-bases.

Q: How do the psycho-physical combinations come into being?

A: With the appearance of inactive or passive consciousness (*vinna* or *vipaka citta*) the psycho-physical combinations come into being.

Q: How does passive consciousness appear?

A: It is the outcome of latent Karmic energies (*sankhara*).

## 34 Why Buddhism?

Q: How do Karmic energies (*sankhara*) appear?

A: Their appearance depends upon ignorance (*avijja*) which is a facet of *Tanha*.

Thus it is apparent that ignorance (*avijja*) is at the base of the whole process of birth or origination. However, this beginning cannot be taken as a 'prima causa', a metaphysical cause or as a cosmogenic principle; but as a condition under which development takes place. In dependence upon the one, another may arise. In fact this is a conditional arising '*paticca samuppada*'. The entire phenomenon is a series called the cycle of existence or '*bhava cakka*'. Any link can be combined with any other. These links (i.e. ignorance, karmic energies, etc.) are known as the twelve spokes of the wheel of existence.

Further, these spokes are linked with the past, present and future in succession or series. In the background of past life, ignorance and karmic energies are found. Within the sphere of the present life there are Reactive types of consciousness, psycho-physical combinations, the six sense-bases, contact, sensation, craving, clinging, formation of karmic tendencies. In the future

are seen the re-birth and attendant sufferings. Thus the cycle of existence of being is linked with the periods of past, present and future. It goes on.

Here we have a religion in which we can find true religious principles which can be maintained without changing the essential ideas and principles at any time, anywhere, under any circumstances. Yet, the capacity of humans to value these religious ideas may well disappear in course of time. Man is likely to experience difficulty in practising these principles while living in a corrupted society. But the value of this precious golden discipline will remain and be appreciated by understanding people everywhere.

It is hoped that the explanations given here will serve as an appropriate answer to the question posed, "Why Buddhism?" – and why Buddhism is still so vitally needed especially in this modern era.

## **SERVICES AVAILABLE AT BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA**

- Dana for Monks (at Vihara or Home) and Bana (Sermons)
- Blessing Services / Funeral Services by Monks
- Booking of Facilities for religious functions / events
- Marriage Registration
- Full Moon / New Moon Day Puja & Free Vegetarian Lunch
- Sunday Dhamma Classes for Children & Adults
- Buddhist & Pali University Diploma Courses
- K Sri Dhammananda Library
- Bookshop
- Kindergarten - Tadika Sudharma
- PARAMA Business & I.T. Training Centre

### **WEEKLY ACTIVITIES**

- |  |                   |                      |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|
| • Daily Puja                           |                   | 6.30a.m. & 7.30p.m.  |
| • Choir Practice                       | Tuesday           | 8.00p.m.             |
| • Special Talk                         | Friday            | 1.00p.m.             |
| • Dhamma Talk                          | Friday            | 8.00p.m.             |
| • Meditation                           | Mon, Tues & Thurs | 8.00p.m.             |
| • Bojjhanga Puja                       | Saturday          | 7.30p.m. - 8.30p.m.  |
| • Puja & Talk                          | Sunday            | 8.30a.m.             |
| • Dhamma School                        | Sunday            | 8.30a.m. & 11.00a.m. |
| • Dharma for the Deaf<br>(fortnightly) | Sunday            | 2.00p.m.             |

### **DONATION IN CASH OR KIND CAN BE MADE FOR:**

- Propagation of Buddhism (Dhammaduta)
- Free Publications (Malaysia and Overseas) - Annually about 300,000 books in 19 Languages
- Education Fund
- Full Moon and New Moon services sponsorship
- General Maintenance of the Buddhist Maha Vihara
- Utilities (Electricity, water, telephone, administration etc)
- Illumination (lighting) of the Main Shrine Hall
- Illumination (lighting) of the Awkana Buddha & Cakra
- Monks' Dana
- Monks' Requisites
- Welfare Fund (Malaysia and Overseas)
- Special Religious Events
  - Wesak
  - Annual Blessing Service
  - Annual Merit Offering
  - Kathina Pinkama (ceremony)
  - Monks' Novitiate Programme

**MAY THE BLESSINGS OF THE NOBLE TRIPLE GEM  
BE WITH YOU AND YOUR FAMILY**



# DONATION FORM

## **Buddhist Maha Vihara**

123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields,

50470 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan, Malaysia.

Tel: 603-22741141 Fax: 603-22732570

I / We would like to make a donation to the Buddhist Maha Vihara.

Name : .....

Address : .....

.....

.....

Amount : RM .....

Towards : Free Publications

(English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, Sinhalese, Spanish,  
Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, Hindi, Kannada, Telegu,  
Oriya, Kishwahili, Chichewa, Luganda, Brazilian Portugese,  
Dutch)

☐

Others, please specify .....

.....

All cheques can made payable to: BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA  
or TT to "BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA" ACCOUNT NO.  
0061-10-003018-0, EON BANK BERHAD, BRICKFIELDS,  
KL. Kindly send us a copy of your BANK SLIP so that we can  
send you an OFFICIAL RECEIPT.

Donations can also be made by VISA and Master Card at the  
Buddhist Maha Vihara Office.



**Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society**

佛陀教义弘扬协会

Buddhist Maha Vihara,  
123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields,  
50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel: 603-22741141 Fax: 603-22732570

E-Mail: [info@buddhistmahavihara.com](mailto:info@buddhistmahavihara.com)

Website: [www.buddhistmahavihara.com](http://www.buddhistmahavihara.com)

[www.ksridhammananda.com](http://www.ksridhammananda.com)