

PREFACE

On one of the hottest days of April in 1977, I was baptized a Christian, a conversion from Buddhism to Christianity, shockingly weirding my parents and kith and kin out. My sudden embrace of a new religion is partly due to the fact that I was then spiritually adventurous or game enough to learn a new religion as its true follower, but also to the fact that I went out of my way to make my Christian girlfriend happy, whom I was going to marry in that April.

After that, I, as a neophyte, went to church, read the Bible and listened to sermons. Shortly afterwards, I came to know that when boiling all the writings in the Bible down, we have got only three important concepts that can help mould us into a good Christian - faith, hope and love - and of these three, the most essential is love. 1 John 4:7-9 reads:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love belongs to God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God; he who does not love, does not know God, for God is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 reads :

Thus 'faith and hope and love last on, these three', but the greatest of all is love.

However, I do not subscribe to the view that love can help us get liberated, for love and hate are the obverse and the reverse of the same coin; you cannot have one without the other. In *The Witching Hour*, Anne Rice writes:

"Because I am in pain, and if there is a God, he made this pain."

"But he makes love, too, if he exists."

"Yes . Love . Love is the source of my pain."

Edward Conze points out :

Love cometh from compainonship;

In the wake of love upsurges ill.

More than 2,500 years ago, the Buddha also said :

Piyato Jāyatīsoko,

Piyato Jāyatibhayan.

(Love is the source of sorrow, agony, fear and trouble.)

Accordingly, I turned an apostate on the downlow, discarded the Bible reading, quit church going and, again, had my nose in books on Buddhism. I also spent most of my time with my father discussing religious problems. Consequently I converted to Theravada again. Among different forms of Buddhism, Theravada is still recondite, barely known and less popular, and I prefer this unsung one to other forms. In her book, *Freedom from Fear*, Aung San Suu Kyi writes :

Theravada Buddhism is sometimes called 'Hinayana', meaning 'Small vehicle', particularly by Buddhists of Mahayana sect. 'Mahayana' means 'Great vehicle', Mahayana Buddhism contains much that is taken from Hinduism and Tantrism, which involves many secret and magic rituals. Mahayana Buddhists tend to believe that their religious practices and

attitudes are broader, and therefore greater, than those of the Theravada sect.

Nevertheless, Theravada has its own problem to describe its way out clearly. It says an unavoidable part of existence is suffering whose root cause, that is to be destroyed to stop suffering, is desire, greed and attachment. Aung San Suu Kyi pithily writes:

The path is also known as the Middle Way, because it avoids two extremes: one extreme is the search for happiness through the pursuit of pleasure, the other extreme is the search for happiness through inflicting pain on oneself. The final goal of a Buddhist is to be liberated from the cycle of existence and rebirth, called *samsāra*. Once this final liberation is achieved, one may be said to have attained *nirvana*; this word means 'extinction' and might be explained as Ultimate Reality for all Buddhists.

In his book, *The River of lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma*, Thant Myint-U states;

Buddhism was then (in Asoka's time) a couple of centuries old. Its founder, Gautama Siddhartha, had been born heir to a minor chieftainship in the Himalayan foothills but had given up princely power and pleasures to reflect on the nature of human existence. Buddhists believe that he attained enlightenment and went on to teach what he had learned, preaching his first sermon at Sarnath and traveling around the great cities of North India until his death (from a meal of tainted pork) at age eighty in 484 B.C. Today his teachings are part of many different philosophies and schools of practice, with the Mahayana schools of Tibet, China, and Japan, a branch distinct from the more conservative Theravada schools of Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. At the core of both are his ideas on people's dissatisfaction with their lives, the origin of this dissatisfaction, and a way out of this dissatisfaction, in part

through the living of an ethical and balanced life and a perspective that accepts change as integral to all things.

To get emancipated, one must practise the *vipassana* meditation to develop right understanding - the wisdom that develops within oneself at experimental level - and our *suta-maya paññā*, wisdom acquired by hearing or reading the words of another, and our *cintā-maya paññā*, intellectual understanding, are useless in this process. This way, Theravada resembles an empiricist theory : the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It cannot explain why our acquired or borrowed wisdom and intellectual understanding fail, which makes most of the logical and intelligent minds dissatisfied with its doctrine. I believe it is a logical lacuna or a seemingly insoluble jigsaw puzzle that I have tried to fill or solve in this book from my mere perspective.

I do not trust that my work on Buddhism can serve as a Rosetta stone, helping you plumb the mysteries of Theravada philosophy. And I am not putting a new complexion on it or flesh on the bones of Buddhism. I am just floating my own ideas - food for thought. Therefore, readers should take my ideas with a pinch of salt as I feel I am not pumping up the value of Theravada so much as dumping it down - taking the gilt off the gingerbread of Buddhism. Maybe I happen to gild the lily or over-egg the pudding, or at least conflate entirely unrelated concepts in my argument. So, if my ideas are not coterminous with those of Buddhist philosophy, I shoulder the responsibility and blame for every shortcoming that may appear somewhere in this book.

As I do not provide a glossary for my readers, I have to expound a few orthographic differences between some Pāli words and Sanskrit words. The word *dharma* and *dhama* are the same semantically, and the word *dharma* is of more lexicographically correct spelling and both have many different meanings. In the introduction to his book, *Buddhist Scriptures*, Edward Conze writes: The word 'Dharma', in particular, is deliberately ambiguous, with up to ten meanings. On page 198, for instance, we find 'dharma' first used twice in the sense

of 'properties' ; at its third occurrence it means 'teachings'; two lines later the meaning has shifted to 'events', only to move onto 'true facts' a little later on.

There are also spelling differences between some more Pāli words and Sanskrit words like *Khandhas* and *skhandhas*; *nirvana* (more lexicographically correct spelling) and *nibbana* ; *sangha* and *samgha* ; *yogi* (male meditator) and *yogin* (*yogini* is female meditator); *sutra* (more lexicographically correct spelling) and *sutta*; *arahant* and *arahat* ; *jhana* and *dhyana*; *paccekabuddha* (silent Buddha) and *pratyekabuddha* ; and *kamma* (less lexicographically correct spelling) and *karma*. Readers should notice that *nivarana* (hindrance) is not *nirvana* (final liberation), and *Siddhartha* (Buddha-to-be), the prince, is different to his namesake, Hesse's hero, *Siddhartha*. *Tathagata*, according to the Dictionary of Buddhist Terms (Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar), is one who has trod the Path of Reality; one who has reached ultimate reality; (Lit) "thus come, thus gone" - the Buddha. And *samsāric* is the adjective of *samsāra*; Myanmar is Burma (at its fortieth press conference on May 26, 1989, the military junta in Burma has changed the name of the country to "Myanmar"). In this book, used are words spelt abiding by more lexicographically correct spelling system that are more easily recognizable for international readers, except in direct quotations from other sources.

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