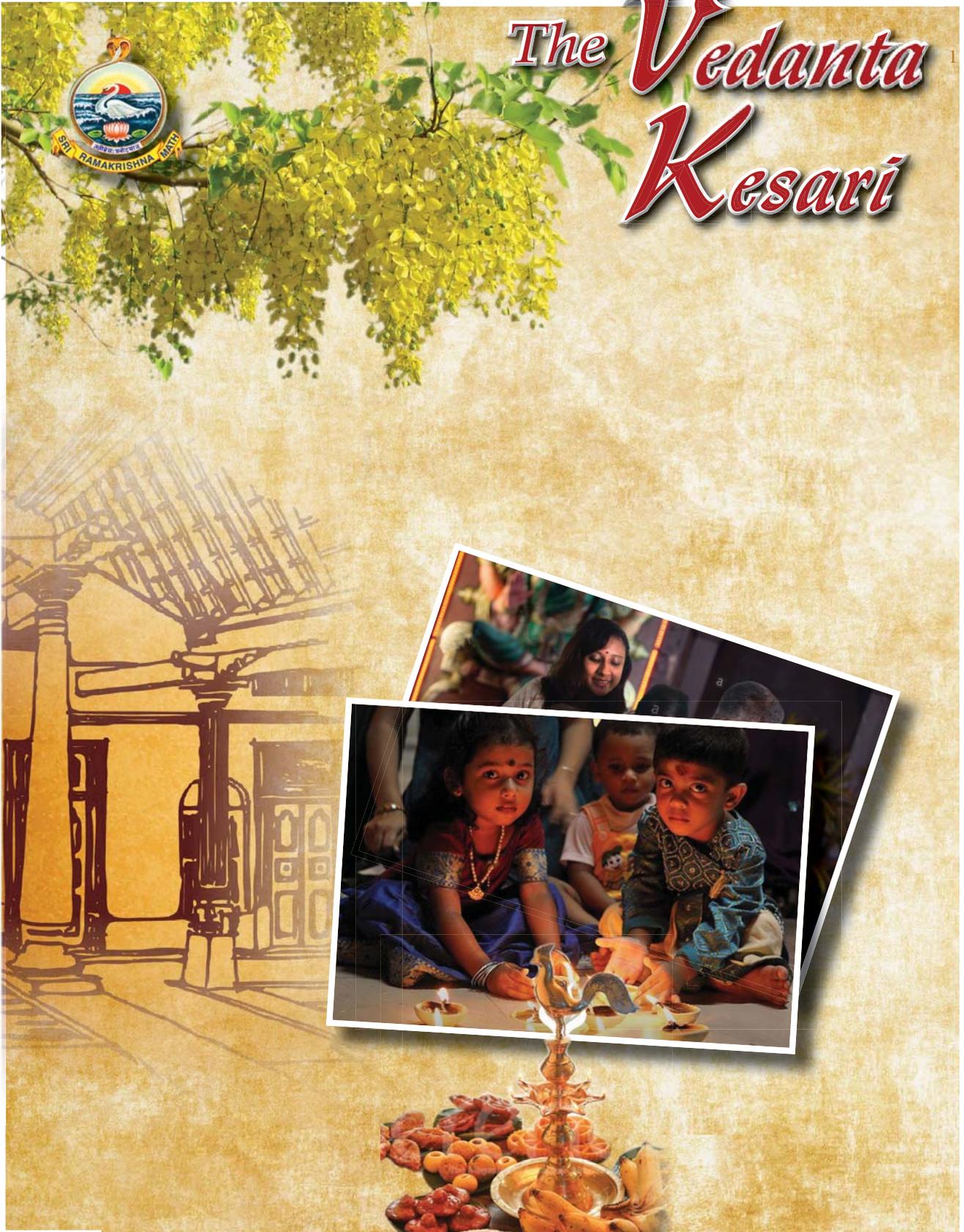


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of the Ramakrishna Order since 1914

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THE VEDANTA KESARI



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Dhyana Paramita: The Perfection of Meditation

*Shamatha, Vipashyana, Buddhanupashyana and
Buddhanusmriti*

DR. AMARTYA KUMAR BHATTACHARYA

This article deals with Dhyana Paramita, the Perfection of Meditation. It is an attempt to present an understanding of the essence of Dharma.

Buddhism, a major world faith, was founded by Lord Buddha in India over two thousand five hundred years ago. It has spread peacefully over much of Asia and also to Kalmykia in eastern Europe and has millions of adherents in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, China (including Tibet), Taiwan, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and also in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Russia (Buryatia and Tuva in Siberia and Kalmykia in eastern Europe). The northern extremity of Buddhism in Asia is the Ivolga Monastery in Siberia, Russia. This article is an exposition of Buddhism and the word 'faith' is used here as a synonym of 'religion'. Buddhism is also called *Saddharma*, the true faith, or simply *Dharma*.

The Sanskrit word dharma literally means 'property'. For example, one says that the dharma of fire is to burn. This means that the property of fire is to burn. The fire cannot be separated from its capacity to burn. Similarly, the literal meaning of Dharma of man is the basic property of man from which he cannot be

separated. This means the spirituality inherent in man.

The objective of Buddhism is *Niroana* or Liberation and *Bodhi* or Enlightenment. The word *Buddhi* means intellect and the word *Bodha* means to understand; it is from these words that the word *Bodhi* is derived. Who is it that seeks Nirvana, Bodhi? It is *Aham* or 'I', who am writing right now. Understanding sharpens me, refines me, contextualises me, and keeps me on the path to Bodhi and Nirvana. *Anubodha* or deep understanding is the context of Bodhi, and Nirvana. Rephrasing Nagarjuna, the founder of the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism, *Shunyata*, emptiness, is the absence of ignorance. *Avidya Paramam Malam* (*Avijja Paramam Malam* in Pali), 'Ignorance is the greatest impurity' is what Lord Buddha said. Nagarjuna can be further re-interpreted to derive the understanding that Nirvana is not only available for a man in *Samsara*, the empirical and phenomenal world, but is only possible within it, subject to the condition that the *Arya Ashtanga Marga*, the Noble Eightfold Path is rigorously followed. The conclusion Nagarjuna reached, in his seminal work *Mula Madhyamaka Karika*, is that all things lack *Swabhava*, a fixed essence, or *Swalakshana*, a



fixed individual character, and that is why they are amenable to change. In other words, change is possible only if entities are devoid or empty (Shunya) of Swabhava. The Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism split into the *Prasangika Madhyamika* (as represented by Chandrakirti) and the *Swatantrika Madhyamika* (as represented by Bhavaviveka). Buddhism has two main branches, Theravada and Mahayana; the difference between the two will be explained in due course.

Man's quest for an end to his suffering has led him into an exploration of his inner self, its working and its dysfunctional behaviour under certain circumstances. Under such conditions a radical shift in consciousness, perception and attitude is the only succour for a tormented mind. This process, involving the destruction of suffering, is based on the Four Noble Truths enunciated by Lord Buddha which are:

- 1) Life contains suffering.
- 2) Suffering has a cause, and the cause can be known.
- 3) Suffering can be brought to an end.
- 4) The path to end suffering has eight parts.

Lord Buddha also laid out the Noble Eightfold Path known as Ashtanga Marg:

- 1) Right view
(*Samyak Dristi/Samma Ditti [Sanskrit & Pali]*)
- 2) Right intention
(*Samyak Sankalpa/ Samma Sankappa*)
- 3) Right speech
(*Samyak Vakya/Samma Vacha*)
- 4) Right action
(*Samyak Karma/Samma Kammanta*)
- 5) Right livelihood
(*Samyak Jivika/Samma Ajiva*)
- 6) Right effort
(*Samyak Vyayama/Samma Vayama*)
- 7) Right mindfulness
(*Samyak Smriti/Samma Sati*)
- 8) Right concentration
(*Samyak Samadhi/Samma Samadhi*)

This Path is also known as Madhyama Pratipada, the Middle Path because it is neither too easy nor too difficult. The first five parts of the Path involve maintaining a lifestyle full of Shila or virtue while the last three pertain to the practice of meditation. The Path is called The Way in the Far East. Meditation lies at the heart of the spiritual practice. To be a Buddhist means to distinguish between Buddhist and non-Buddhist acts, between Ignorance and Enlightenment, between Samsara and Nirvana. Pancha Shila is for householders; Ashta Shila is for householders practising Brahmacharya or celibacy; and Dasha Shila is for monks.

According to Lord Buddha, man is his own master. *Atta hi attano natho* are the exact words of Lord Buddha. He also said *Atmadvipa viharatha, atmasharana ananyasharana* meaning 'Dwell making yourself your island (that is refuge), and not anyone else as your refuge.' Man is however unaware of this fact and abdicates his responsibility of controlling his future, even death. This is so because man is, in a deep philosophical sense, deluded, asleep and unaware of his true nature. He normally identifies himself with his body, which was born and hence will die some day. This gives rise to vices, insecurity and belief in that what is not. Man lives in illusions; the illusion that he will never fall sick, the illusion that no harm will ever befall him. He also believes that he has relatives and friends and, if he clings onto them tightly enough, he will one day, after death, go to the nebulous place called heaven. But it is not true. The lacuna in man's thinking becomes disturbingly clear to him when he finds that he is suffering. When a man suffers, the world seems to collapse around him. Man needs to be awakened and when this awakening process is complete, man will rise from the ashes of the world of the senses that he has just burnt, to the world of pure consciousness. Buddhism is a journey where a man starts asleep and ends up awake. In doing so, he sheds aside nothingness

to awaken to a single state of Being. The process by which this takes place is meditation.

The word *Buddha* means one who is awake. He is the messiah who showed the path to eternity. Lord Buddha gave His teaching for *Bahujanahitaya, Bahujanasukhaya, Lokanukampaya* 'for the good of many, for the happiness of many, for showing compassion to the world'. He told man that though he is asleep, the capacity to be awakened is in him and also taught man the path to awakening. But man must walk that path himself, alone. Man must realise that he is always alone, whether it be high atop the mountains, in the company of his relatives, or in the morning crowd in the downtown of a metropolitan city. A positive attitude to aloneness can develop in man when he can take a mental sword and cleave a distinction between aloneness and loneliness. Loneliness has a negative connotation in the sense that it implies a craving for company of other human beings, the exact opposite of the self-sufficiency implied by aloneness. The capacity to tread the path to Nirvana is already in man, he just has to use it. In the *Dharmachakrapravartana Sutra*, Lord Buddha said that Nirvana is not subject to grief, defilement, disease, decay, and death. In other words, Nirvana is beyond cause and effect, it transcends conditioned phenomena. Lord Buddha also said *Nirvanam Paramam Sukham*, Nirvana is ultimate bliss. Nirvana is *Apratitya-samutpanna*, unconditioned, and *Asamskrita* and, according to Vasubandhu of the Yogachara school of Mahayana Buddhism, it is the *Parinishpanna Swabhava*, true self-nature of Being. It is interesting to note that in the *Lankavatara Sutra* which is a Mahayana Sutra

associated with the Yogachara school, Nirvana is described as

the seeing of everything as it is. Nirvana is a positive Absolute and is Nitya, i.e., without beginning and end. Nirvana means a state of Mukti, absolute freedom. Nirvana also denotes Truth and Peace. A synonym for Nirvana is Moksha, liberation. Nirvana is a state of absolute perfection. Shariputra, the famous disciple of Lord Buddha, described Nirvana as the extinction of desire, hatred and illusion. In mystical language, Nirvana is the experience of standing face-to-face with Reality. Nirvana is equated with Bodhi and is the Paramartha-Satya. Nirvana is sometimes expressed as negative of negative such as the cessation of suffering, of craving, of aversion, etc. This need not result in any confusion. In Sanskrit, sometimes positive things are expressed as negatives of negatives as for example the word *Arogya* which means recuperation from illness and *Amrita* which means immortal. Further, as mathematics proves, negative of negative is always positive. Nirvana is a freeing from the chains of a false sense of individuality. Nirvana is a state of Advaita or Advaya, non-duality; a state where the illusion of a false sense of 'I' or *Parikalpita Swabhava* does not exist. Expressed differently, liberation from the illusion of separateness of the individual Self from the Whole is Nirvana. Freedom is, Nirvana is, Truth is.

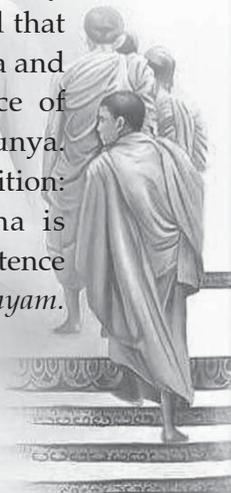
According to Buddhism, everything is relative and *Anitya* or impermanent in the empirical, conditioned world. Lord Buddha told Rashtrapala, 'The world is in continuous flux and is impermanent.' One cannot step twice into the same river because although we may continue to see the same river externally, the water molecules at a particular location at any moment are different from the water molecules the moment before and the moment after. One thing disappears, conditioning the appearance of the next in a series of cause and effect. Everything is in a state of becoming something else the next moment. A wheel



cannot be separated from its movement. There is no static wheel 'behind' the wheel in motion. Things change over time. Everything originates dependent on other factors. That is, all things come into existence as the result of an interaction of various causes. Each entity is *Pratitya-samutpanna*, conditioned, as well as *Pratitya-samutpada*, conditioning. The Law of Dependent Origination is central to Buddhism. For example, anger cannot arise by itself without a cause. The five aggregates, Rupa, Vedana, Sangya, Samskara and Vigyana, all of which are identified as Anatma, non-Soul, by Lord Buddha in the *Anatmalakshana Sutra*, are called the *Pancha Skandha*. Sensations of the physical world of forms are received by the five physical sense organs such as the nose. The mind feels the mental world. The five physical sense organs and the mind are called the six sensory bases. Sensations lead to perceptions, which in turn lead through pre-dispositions or Samskara to consciousness, Vigyana. Theravada Buddhism, introduces the concept of *Bhavanga*, stream of thought, and the Yogachara school of Mahayana Buddhism introduces the concept of *Alaya-Vigyana* which literally means the abode of consciousness, but is commonly translated as store-consciousness. The *Alaya-Vigyana*, which maintains the continuum of consciousness, is the mind; hence this school is also called the *Chittamatratavada* school. Other names of the same school are *Agamanuyayi Vigyanavada* and *Vigyaptimatratavada*. The *Vigyanavada* school is further divided into the *Nirakaravadi Vigyanavada* (as represented by Asanga) and the *Sakaravadi Vigyanavada* (as represented by Gyanashri Mitra). The fundamental concept of the Yogachara school may be expressed by the proposition that the *Parinishpanna Swabhava* is realised when man pierces through his *Parikalpita Swabhava* and *Paratantra Swabhava*, conditioned self-nature.

The *Alaya-Vigyana*, as conceived in Mahayana Buddhism, is a permanent entity.

The *Alaya-Vigyana* contains all impressions of past actions and all future potentialities. It is also the *Tathagatagarbha* or Buddha-Matrix, the basis on which a man can become a Buddha. So, latent in every man is a Buddha-like faculty called Buddha-Dhatu or Buddha-Nature. Right meditation leads to spiritual Enlightenment, which is nothing but the full manifestation of the Buddha-Dhatu in man. Thus, any man can develop himself through appropriate practice, that is meditation, and become a Buddha. Anyway, for an average man, the summation of all physical and mental processes, processes in constant flux, is perceived empirically as 'I'. The empirical 'I' is ephemeral and impermanent, and is *Samvriti-Satya*, conventional truth. Conscious of something, one reacts mentally. The mental reactions are of two types: craving and aversion. Craving or Trishna, and aversion or Dvesha; both lead to suffering. It is self-evident that aversion results in suffering and craving results in suffering because if the object of craving remains out of reach, there is suffering. Thus, ultimately, whatever is impermanent is Duhkha or suffering. The renowned sage Buddhaghosa, the writer of the *Visuddhimagga* or *Vishuddhi Marga*, The Path of Purification, has dwelt elaborately on suffering. Taking the lead from Nagarjuna, we can posit that Duhkha is transient; it arises dependent on something else and also decays into extinction. Duhkha is not self-determining; its existence and character are attributable to factors that condition its origin and subsequent transformation. Coming into existence and dying out of existence, Duhkha lacks any trace of permanence. Thus, it may be said that Duhkha lacks a *Swabhava* or *Swalakshana* and is characterised by *Nishwabhava*, absence of Self-Nature. Thus Duhkha is empty, *Shunya*. We can therefore, formulate the proposition: *Duhkhameva Shunyam*. Because Duhkha is ephemeral, we can expand the Sanskrit sentence to this: *Duhkhameva Anityam evam Shunyam*.



The perception of the emptiness of Duhkha allows one to let go of Duhkha and thus be released of the hold that Duhkha has on him. This is, of course, intended as a Mahayana Buddhist theoretical complement to Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation and is in no way a substitute for them. Again, the notion of Buddha-Dhatu is a very productive concept. Any meditator's meditation is bound to become better if he remembers during meditating that he has Buddha-Dhatu in him.

It may be mentioned, at this stage, that practitioners who are extremely advanced spiritually are called *Arhat* in Theravada Buddhism and *Bodhisattva* (aspirants to Buddhahood) in Mahayana Buddhism. A Bodhisattva is any man who has taken a vow to follow the path to Buddhata taking all other sentient beings with him. A Bhikshu, monk and a lay disciple are both Bodhisattvas. Sattva means a sentient being.

In response to questioning by devotees in the kingdom of Kosala as to the importance or unimportance of belief, Lord Buddha pointed out the distinction between knowing and believing. Believing always connotes a second-hand approach to Truth; it is to learn of something through the experience of someone else. Knowing means a first-hand direct knowledge of Truth and the result of this distinction is that the modicum of doubt that always accompanies belief is absent in knowledge. Freedom of thought is permitted by Lord Buddha to His devotees so that they can discriminate and find Truth. Nirvana cannot be had via someone else's knowledge.

Buddhism also strongly believes in the theory of Karma and in the concept of rebirth. Lord Buddha said, *Chetana 'ham bhikkhave kammam vadami. Chetayitva kammam*

karoti kayena vachaya manasa, 'Monks, I say that volition is action. Having thought, one acts through body, speech and mind.' Body or Kaya Vajra, Speech or Vak Vajra, and Mind or Chitta Vajra are called Tri Vajra in a certain school of Mahayana Buddhism. There are two types of Karma, *Kushala Karma* or good actions which are Dharmic, and *Akushala Karma* or bad actions which are Adharmic. The result of both types of Karma are called Karma Phala, which correspond to the type of Karma performed.

He searched, He meditated, He found: this aptly summarises the awakening of Lord Buddha. When a man suffers, it is useless for him to talk of God, or to fast and otherwise to torture his body if his suffering is not reduced by any or all of these. Lord Buddha realised this fact, and after His awakening taught the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Meditation is one form of mental culture. In meditation, what is required of man is to effect a radical shift in consciousness from the finite to the infinite using right concentration. The concentrated focus is always on the elimination of suffering. The law of cause and effect is at work here too. If one is deluded, one suffers. If one studies the Four Noble Truths, one sees that man should identify the cause of suffering and systematically go about destroying it using the Noble Eightfold Path. The result of meditation is tremendous. One transcends the boundaries of his body; he senses that the entire universe has become his body. He senses that he has exchanged a weak mind for a strong one. He senses that though he may continue to reside in his mortal body, his consciousness has become irreversibly altered. He feels himself being pervaded by peace. He becomes awakened; Prabuddha. Lord Buddha did not give the Dharma for strong wills only; His statements are just as applicable to weaker minds provided they have the determination to follow Him. He asked for nothing more than courage and promised eternity. *(to be continued. . .)*