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THE TERM SADDHĀ BASED ON COMMENTARIES

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ABSTRACT

The present work is an attempt to treat the term of *Saddhā* based on commentaries. The Dhamma of the Buddha is not a religion of blind faith. It is far more demanding than that. It is a religion of experience; of exploration and discovery. The Buddha said that his teaching was *Ehipassiko* which means come and see. Few of the great teachers in history have made such a bold and confident claim. His teachings not only withstand methodical examination, they demand it. Because of this, the role of the faith faculty in Buddhism may be difficult to grasp. We should clarify that by faith I mean the enlightenment factor and spiritual faculty of *saddhā*.



KEYWORDS: *The Meaning of Saddhā, Classification of Saddhā, Resoluteness of Saddhā*

INTRODUCTION

Many religions could be described as religions of faith in that they teach that faith is sufficient of salvation. In this sense Buddhism is not a religion of faith. Faith is important, not because it leads to salvation, but because the psychological qualities it imparts motivates one to walk the path, prepares one for the journey and substations one until results are achieved. Emotionally it is an attitude of serenity and joy which frees one from the discomfort of doubt and thus prepares the mind for meditation.

The meaning of *Saddhā*

The concept of *Saddhā* plays an important role in Buddhism. It is completely different from the concepts of faith in other religions. The word *saddhā* can be translated into English as faith, trust, respect, and confidence. In Buddhism the confidence also refers to *saddhā*. Some scholars give the explanation of *saddhā* as not faith because of its emphasis on understanding. Confidence cannot be obtained by faith, since it places less emphasis on reason, but only by understanding. The confidence is product of reason, knowledge and experience. When it is developed, confidence can never be blind faith that becomes a power of the mind. Referring to the un-intelligible and blind nature of faith, *Voltaire* said: "Faith is to believe in something which your reason tells you cannot be true; for if your reason approved of it, there could be no question of blind faith."

Blind faith is foreign to Buddhism that is here rational and intensely practical which system cannot contain mysteries or esoteric doctrines. Where there is no blind faith, there cannot be any coercion or persecution or fanaticism. The term faith is synonym with belief, *Walpola Rahula* says: "The question of belief arises when there is no seeing – seeing in every sense of the word. The moment you see, the question of belief disappears. If I tell you that I have a gem hidden in the folded palm of my

hand, the question of belief arises because you do not see it yourself. But if I unclench my fist and show you the gem, then you see it for yourself, and the question of belief does not arise. So the phrase in ancient Buddhist texts reads. Realizing, as one sees a gem in the palm.'According to Buddhist philosophy, it is a purifying mental factor in the mind and has a deeper philosophical meaning than that of mere confidence. Firstly, it is a confidence born out of understanding or conviction of the Four Noble Truths. Secondly, it is a feeling of reverence or esteems which a follower accords to a personality, or a set of doctrines. Thirdly, it implies an earnest hope of execution and realizes ethical principles of developing one's innate morality.

The faith is essential for progress in mundane as well as in supra-mundane things. This point is brought out by Buddha in several discourses. Buddha said to *Āṅvaka*: "Faith is the most excellent treasure possessed by man in this world" affirming the words of his predecessor the Buddha *Kassapa* in order to set forth the two-fold value of faith, the spiritual and the material or the mundane and the supra-mundane. The confidence begins with a temporary conviction of a morally wholesome object: but gradually it develops to a form of unshakeable trust in the Noble One. Buddha has denounced blind faith and pointed out that it cannot help the follower in any way in his self-purification. He always emphasized that one should believe in *Dhamma* only after having understood it. Also he often praised the one who is endowed with confidence based on knowledge. So confidence is called *saddhā* in Buddhist terminology. *Saddhā* is well-established in the Triple Gems (*Buddha, dhamma, saṅgha*), Noble Eightfold Path, *kamma* and its results (*phala*).

When a Buddhist takes refuge in the Triple-gem, his faith should be reasoned and rooted in understanding, and he asks to investigate or test the object of his faith. Buddhist faith is not in conflict with the spirit of enquiry. Any doubt about dubious things is allowed and inquiry into them is encouraged. When one understands the virtues of the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, etc., in all aspects, one has faith that these things are real and that they can extinguish all suffering and bring eternal peace and happiness. When one has such faith and knows that one can rely on them, one is not hesitant to fight bravely against the hindrances. In fact, the Triple-gems are the greatest powers in the world. When one is sure that one can get the help of these powers, one is certain to achieve success. If faith is very strong, one can put the suffering or *saṃsāra* to end. In other words, the nature of faith with self-confidence on the nobility of the Triple-gems, the nobility of the three trainings, that is the training of morality, concentration, wisdom, the outlook of relationship of dependence-origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), the past five aggregates called anterior extremity of rounds of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), the future five aggregates called posterior extremity of rounds of rebirth, both past and future five aggregates called anterior and posterior extremities of rounds of rebirth, is called the faith (*saddhā*).

The Buddha taught us to live happily and peacefully. He taught us the way leading to the cessation of all kinds of suffering. We believe that if we follow his teaching or his way, we are sure to live happily and peacefully, getting rid of suffering. For this reason, we also believe in the *dhamma*.

We also believe that by chanting *suttas* and *parittas* as taught by the Buddha, we perform meritorious deeds which will be conducive to the cessation of suffering. Performing these meritorious deeds form devotional aspect of Buddhism. This is definition of *saddhā*.

Classification of *Saddhā*

There are two kinds of *saddhā*:

- (1) Rootless faith (*amūlaka-saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith,
- (2) Faith with a good cause (*ākāravati-saddhā*), faith founded on seeing; also called *aveccapasāda*.

Therein, the rootless faith is explained in the texts as "not seen, not heard, not suspected." Faith with a good cause is blind faith. The first kind of faith is essentially a sublimation of desire in its various forms; or more simply, faith is sanitized desire. Often faith in someone or something arises in one when one thinks. A person or a thing has fulfilled one's desire or come up to one's expectations. The greatest flaw in such a faith is the object of faith that is outside of oneself, which is easily controlled and manipulated by those who define. In fact, a faith system is neither religious nor spiritual; it is a political

system of sorts since it is power-based. Political systems are ephemeral and can provide only worldly benefits at best.

The second kind of faith—the faith with a good causes—is also called wise faith. While rootless faith is founded on an external object (God, guru, etc.); wise faith is an internal feeling. It begins with an overpowering experience (*saṃvega*) of true reality, especially an encounter with impermanence or a near-death experience that leads one to ask life's basic questions. The kind of questions that arise here would decide the quality of faith in the person. If the question is framed by what or who, one presumes a thing or a being merely as mental constructs. These are closed questions that keep one in a transcendental loop, a *saṃsāric* cycle, where no meaningful questions can be asked, and no answers can be found. A better question here is why, which initiates a series of questions that can go as far as the source, as it were. The source here refers to spiritual ignorance, not knowing true reality, and falling on unwholesome emotions and mental constructs. The most revealing formulation of this situation is found in dependent arising.

Resoluteness of Faith

In the *Adhigama-saddhā* form, which belongs to the *ariyas*, faith becomes more resolute-unwavering, undaunted, undeviating and unshakable by any means. Once a leper by the name of *Suppabuddha* was listening to the Buddha's teaching at the periphery of the audience. Training his mind on the arising objects, he was able to grasp the Truth, purified his mind, developed *samādhi* and *ñāṇa* and finally attained *sotāpanna*. Wishing to describe his unique experience to the Exalted One, he waited for the crowd to disperse so that he could have an opportunity to draw near to the Buddha. While he was making his way, he met by *sakka* (the king of the deity). Wishing to test the leper's faith, *sakka* called on him to declare that the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *saṅgha* were false and worthless in exchange offering him life-long wealth, thus persuading him to lose faith in the Triple-gems. *Sakka* continued, in a tone of withering disparagement, that the leper was poor, wretched, miserable, of low class and a loner. Now how would you react in such a situation? Would you tolerate this kind of insult?

When asked who he was, *sakka* identified himself saying that he had come to help him. There upon the leper reported that *Sakka* was shameless, that leper was indeed not poor, wretched or miserable, because surely a possessor of *saddhā* could not be poor, wretched or miserable, that he was not of low class, because a possessor of *saddhā* could not be so and that he was far from being a loner for a devotee of the Exalted One has become his son and he could not be a loner. Hence the verse was spoken:

Faith, virtue, conscientiousness and fear of blame,
Listening and bounty, yea, and wisdom seventh;
Who had these treasures – woman, man – it's said,
No paupers they, their lives are not in vain.

What gave the pauper the impetus to say this? Whosoever is in possession of unwavering faith after having practised the *dhamma* and seen the truth, will possess the courage to speak out. Buddha has likened his *Dhamma* to a raft: "A man comes by a great stretch of water and sees no way of crossing to the opposite shore which is safe and secure. He fashions a raft out of sticks, branches, leaves and grass and lashings and uses it to cross over to the opposite bank. Suppose now, O monks, he were to say, 'this raft has been of such use to me that I will therefore put it on my head, and carry it with me as I proceed on my journey'... will he do the correct thing with this raft..."

We should believe or have faith in each and everything. If a student has no faith in his teacher, it is difficult for him to learn his lessons from him. But then he should be intelligent enough to distinguish between a good teacher and a bad teacher. In the same way, if a patient has no faith in his physician, he cannot proceed with his treatment. But then he should be intelligent enough to make out a genuine physician from a quack. That is to say, we should not be so skeptical as to have no faith even in the

treatment of a genuine physician and thus fall a victim to quackery. So we should avoid the two extremes of scepticism and credulity and follow the middle path.

There are mental faculties which are neutral in character. It is the kind of application, they are put to which makes them good or bad. For instance, *ditṭhi* or view as such is neutral in character. But when we make wrong use of it, we call it *micchāditṭhi*. When we make right use of it, we call it *sammāditṭhi*. It is true about the other seven steps of the Eight-fold Path. Accordingly we have an ignoble Eight-fold Path leading us downwards and a Noble Eight-fold Path leading us upwards in the scale of spiritual evolution. In the same way, faith as such is neutral in character. When we use it with our eyes closed, without inquiry, then it becomes blind faith. But when we use it with our eyes open, with inquiry, then it becomes rational faith.

CONCLUSION

It is neither a religion in the sense in which that word is commonly understood, for it is not “A system of faith and worship owing any allegiance to a supernatural being.” Buddhism does not demand blind faith from its adherents. In this essay on faith (*saddhā*), it means faith in the *Buddha*, the *dhamma*, the *saṅgha*, *kamma* (action) and its results. It is a combination of two words ‘belief’ and ‘clarity.’ Belief is belief in the triple gems, *kamma* and the results of *kamma*. Clarity is clarity of the process of the mind. When you pay homage to the triple gems, when you are doing meritorious deeds, such as *dāna*, etc; your mind is clear and feel delighted. That is because of faith.

Thus people who have faith in the three-gems will pay homage to the *Buddha*, the *dhamma* and the *saṅgha* respectfully, perform meritorious deeds regularly and practice insight meditation. So they accumulate good *kamma* everyday and these good *kammās* will bear good fruits in many existences starting from this very life. People who have not faith in the *Buddha*, the *dhamma*, the *saṅgha*, *kamma* and its results will not pay homage to the *Buddha*, the *dhamma*, the *saṅgha* respectfully and never perform meritorious deeds such as *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*. They always commit the evil deeds and will go into the darkness (*duggati*) after death because of their bad actions.

If faith is very important for all even in the worldly affairs and secular activities, there is no need to say it is more fundamental and essential for the people who are following the path of liberation from the cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). We can see that the Buddha preached faith in most of his teachings as He wants all of us to know the significance of faith. Faith is the first of the five qualities necessary for higher exertion.

Faith or *saddhā* is thus the best basic factor to increase meritorious deeds, attain noble birth in good destination (*sugati*) and finally reach *nibbāna*. That is why the Buddha had said that *saddhā* is like the hand, like wealth and property and like the good seeds.

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