

## **FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE IN BUDDHISM**

Instead of placing man's destiny under an arbitrary control of an unknown external agency and making man subservient and dependent on that agency for his well being here and after, Buddhism raises the status of man and accords him with the responsibility of moulding his own destiny. This is done by giving due credit to man's intelligence with the view to develop his hidden human potential. "Oneself is the lord of oneself. Who else could be one's lord?" so says the Dhammapada. In this regard, the two concepts, faith and knowledge play very important roles in Buddhist teaching.

As described in Buddhism faith is one of the initial steps leading to knowledge culminating in wisdom. It is not blind faith or self-surrender. Nor baseless confidence born of fear of any human or super human power. In short, an absolute a priori faith is never recommended in Buddhism. Baseless faith (*amulika saddha*) devoid of understanding is compared to a file of blind men holding one another and going round and round without knowing their destination. Faith recommended in Buddhism is qualified with epithet "rational" (*akravati*), thereby making it a product of one's reason and intelligence.

Further it is described as rooted in understanding (*dassana mulika*). As *Anguttare-nikaya* II, 65 puts it, it is not in conflict with the spirit of free inquiry and questioning what is dubious. It is categorically stated that the faculty of faith should be balanced with the faculty of wisdom. Among the file of blind men, the way those who cling on to beliefs on mere faith and resorts to prayer, petition and supplication to any unknown agency, are incapable of achieving the goal of realization.

Since Buddhism values knowledge over faith, the Buddha praises his disciples not for their faith but for their knowledge. In the canon we get the instances where the elder Sariputta is praised for his knowledge while elder Vakkali is advised to give up his excessive faith, because it stood as an obstacle to his salvation. It has also not even a characteristic of an Arahant, a Perfected one. It has no place in the Noble Eight-fold Path leading to realization.

Nevertheless, faith as a fundamental requirement having epistemological significance is explained in Buddhism. As it precedes understanding its epistemological value as a basic tenet is highlighted in many a list of Buddhist ethical concepts. Thus it is the first member of the list of eight kinds of spiritual wealth while it heads the lists of five faculties and five powers. It is the first among the four virtues leading to happy birth in the next life.

As illustrated in early Buddhist scriptures faith is not an end in itself, it is only a means, an initial requirement for an advanced state of achievement. In all the lists of virtues where faith occurs as the first member, knowledge is given as the last. This is evident

from the virtues listed in different contexts in the canonical works such as Majjhima-nikaya, Sanyutta-nikaya and Anguttara-nikaya. Faith in Buddhism is rational and intellectual from its very beginning.

As illustrated in the Canki-sutta as well as in the Kitagiri-sutta, faith is arisen as a result of thoughtful reflection (yonisomanasikara) on what is perceived. With the initiative of faith, equipped with observation and investigation, one passes several stages of the process with open mind, until one attains the objective outcome of one's exertion of one's sense data one experiences from external sources. Obviously, the word faith (saddha) in Buddhism, has four aspects, namely affection or appreciation, aspiration, cognition and determination. So is in the context of the Buddha's saying to its affective and cognitive aspects.

Thus faith with all the above characteristics according to Buddhism is only the initial stage of the onward march to realization which is the climax of knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, in short, rational faith rooted in understanding leads to knowledge and realization.