

What the Buddha Thought About Superstitions

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Introduction

A suggestion can be made due to the research on occultism. It is accepted that superstitions exist in every religion. Similarly beliefs and wish fulfillment are common elements in all religions at the ideological level. All religions are led to practice them for the accomplishment of ambitions of the followers. But there are diverse rituals among Buddhists. The foregoing definition is inapplicable to the Buddha's teaching. As K. Sri Dhammananda denotes superstitions could not be found in the original teaching of the Buddha. There are no invisible forces like magic based on occultism beside the five orders or processes "*niyāma*" operating surrounding us.

- seasonal laws (*utuniyāma*)
- the biological laws (*bijaniyāma*)
- the karmic law (*kammaniyāma*)
- natural phenomena laws (*dhammaniyāma*)
- psychological laws (*citta niyāma*)

Buddhism remarks that man can manage and control those processes with his spiritual power and intellectual methods but not with magical power. One indeed, is one's own savior, for what other purpose would there be a savior? Comprehensively, the Buddha's discourses rejected the superstitions of the contemporary people in India and guided them to avoid wrong views. As the Buddha denoted, worldliness is ignorance (*andha bhuto ayamloko*). A Pali technical term *Micchā- ditṭhi* also mean magical beliefs and customs that are intrinsically operating in the human mind that also hinders the path of liberation. Another aspect, wrong view (*Micchā ditṭhi*) indicates similarity with the ignorance in meaning.

Methodology

The research methodology of this study is mainly based on collected data from literature. Data has been described and analyzed with reference to the historical evolution and meaning of superstitions. The research has

attempted to identify various descriptions and spatial thoughts published in the scholars' books through a content analysis. Details taken from those publications have been critically examined.

Key Findings

The greatest teaching of Buddhism was to avoid superstitions and guidance to observe the reality of what our beliefs are. In the *kālāma sutta* Buddha emphasizes that one should not come to judgment upon doubt criteria. The *sutta* indicates that eight criteria which people cling to strongly may cause the truth we expect to be denied.

- Do not accept anything based upon mere reports, tradition or hearsay,.
- Nor upon the authority of religious texts,
- Nor upon mere reasons and arguments,
- Nor upon one's own inference,
- Nor upon anything which appears to be true,
- Nor upon one's own speculative, opinions,
- Nor upon another's seeming ability,
- Nor upon the consideration "this is our Teaching, it should not be taken as".

In this matter the problem is that there are no scientific techniques which can be applied to a method of verification more reliable than our beliefs. There are a few endeavors of man involved in the investigation and observing the reality of belief that they have acknowledged without experience. *Bhayabherava sutta* describes how the ascetic Gautama was moved from superstitions which were deeply rooted in his mind by investigating belief of horrible spirits which was held by people during his time in India.

Right view, the first step of the noble eight path direction to us is that we should not judge or reject without perusing the information obtained through our sense organs. It may be a challenge to one who has habitual practice of superstitions. Similarly Buddhism directs us to avoid indiscriminate imitation as mentioned in the *cankisutta*.

Wrong view is the cause of all nuisances and calamities. *Alagaddupam Sutta* describes how the wrong grasp leads us to woe and sorrow for a long time. For example, take water – snake held by the coil or by its tail. It may bite the hand or arm or another part of the body. The wrong view leads to sorrow. Buddha denoted that even we should not grasp the Dhamma without examining same. On the other hand wrong view is a demeritorious deed. So that is one of the ten meritorious deeds that we call straightening one's own views. Micchā ditthi, wrong view is abandoned by perceiving what we see with the eye, objects, etc.

The whole teaching of the Buddha was based on the fundamental of *paticcasamuppāda* or dependent origination discovered and revealed by himself. Theoretically, the first chain of dependent origination - ignorance is a root cause of all mass of suffering. For one who follows superstitions and achieved his wishes, this discovery indicates that he must first eradicate ignorance which is the root cause of the origin of suffering. So bearing and grasping the view is more dangerous as catching a snake by hand in the wrong way. Dhammapada states that the established mind with the wrong view does harm; like an enemy does harm to an enemy.

The path to realization exposed by the Buddha was that the path of ignorance leads oneself to become destitute (*mulhassava maggā acikkheyya*) or one in darkness who gets an oil lamp (*andhakareva telapajjotam*) sees the picture with his eyes (*cakkhumanto rūpaṇi dakkhinti*). This means that the Buddha's teaching is a key to opening the door to search for the truth and reject mysticism, fortune – telling, charms, talismans, mantras and prayers. In accordance with Ariyapariyesana sutta, the duty of the Buddha and his first sixty Arahants correspond to preaching the Dhamma to purified beings from the lust of the eye and ignorance. To convert the people from wrong views to right views was the first step of missionary service of the Buddha and his disciples. But many Buddhists use the term “embrace” when people accept the Buddha's teaching or entered to the Buddhist society. In the Pali texts we find another name which the Buddha gave a Buddhist as a stream enterer (*sotapanna*). Stream enterer or one who embraced Buddhism could not believe superstitions. The Buddha named two kinds of Buddhists based on their beliefs, namely *Upasaka Pundarika* and *Upāsaka Candāla* or real Buddhist and ordinary Buddhist. If a believer by curiosity (*koṭūhala - man'galika*) believes in luck (*man'galan pacceti no kamman. man'galan*

oloketi) not deeds, he seeks outside for a gift – worthy person and there first he offers service.

Conclusion

Many of those who practice Buddhist rituals, very often do not presume the idea behind it. It is important to reveal the cause and effect between wish and fulfillment and sacrificial performance. Buddha's investigation and teaching of ritual practice theoretically presents a new interpretation and that leads to free will, wisdom and to moral conduct. The Buddha directed that one should not accept even his own words without a critically examining them. Also one should not ignore his faith towards the Buddha. The Buddha expected to develop penetrative vision and independent thinking in both laity and Bhikkhu. As the first step of the noble eight-fold path, right view aims at the culmination of philosophical free will of ordinary Buddhist and to grasp the importance of the meaning of religious sacrifice.

Accordingly Buddha's interpretation led to sacrifice, though some of the rituals of the Buddhists performed today are rituals of white – magic. This was not similar in the Historic – rite and ceremony of Buddhism in India. With the concept of commemoration early pilgrims visited and worshipped the three sacrificial places where the Buddha was: the place of birth, the place where he attained enlightenment and delivered the first sermon, and the place where he attained *nibbana*. When commemorating such places Buddhists gradually developed the symbolical monuments such as the Bo tree or Stupa image to represent the Buddha. All these symbols have been created with the meaning of social aspects as well as ethical concepts.

Keywords: Beliefs; Practice; Rituals; Sacrifice; Superstition

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