

The Greatness of the Buddha

as edited by

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Narada Thera, in *The Buddha and his Teachings* (1998) elaborates upon the characteristic qualities of the Buddha:

“The Buddha does not call himself a saviour who freely saves others by his personal salvation. The Buddha exhorts his followers to depend on themselves for their deliverance, since both defilement and purity depend on oneself.

Suddhi asuddhi paccattam n'añño aññaṃ visodhaye.
Dhammapada v. 165.

'One cannot directly purify or defile another.'

“Clarifying his relationship with his followers and emphasizing the importance of self-reliance and individual striving, the Buddha plainly states:

Tumhehi kiccam ātappam akkhātāro tathāgatā
Dhammapada v. 276

'You yourselves should make an exertion.
The Tathāgatas are only teachers.'

“The Buddha only indicates the path and method whereby he delivered himself from suffering and death and achieved his ultimate goal. It is left for his faithful adherents who wish their release from the ills of life to follow the path.

To depend on others for salvation is negative, but to depend on oneself is positive. Dependence on others means a surrender of one's effort.

Attadipāviharatha, attapatisaranāanaññasaranā.

Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāparinibbāna

'Be ye isles unto yourselves; be ye a refuge
unto yourselves; seek no refuge in others.'

“These significant words uttered by the Buddha in his last days are very striking and inspiring. They reveal how vital is self-exertion to accomplish one's ends, and how superficial and futile it is to seek redemption through benignant saviours, and crave for illusory happiness in an afterlife through the propitiation of imaginary gods by fruitless prayers and meaningless sacrifices. (Narada 29, 1998)

“The Buddha was a human being. As a man he was born, as a Buddha, he lived, and as a Buddha his life came to an end. Though human, he became an extraordinary man owing to his unique characteristics. The Buddha laid stress on this important point, and left no room for any one to fall into the error of thinking that he was an immortal being. It has been said of him that there was no religious teacher who was ever so godless as the Buddha, yet none was so god-like. In his own time the Buddha was no doubt highly venerated by his followers, but he never arrogated to himself any divinity.

“Born a man, living as a mortal, by his own exertion he attained that supreme state of perfection called Buddhahood, and without keeping his enlightenment to himself, he proclaimed to the world the latent possibilities and the invincible power of the human mind. Instead of

placing an unseen almighty God over man, and giving man a subservient position in relation to such a conception of divine power, he demonstrated how man could attain the highest knowledge and supreme enlightenment by his own efforts.

“He thus raised the worth of man. He taught that man can gain his deliverance from the ills of life and realize the eternal bliss of Nibbāna without depending on an external God or mediating priests. He taught the egocentric, power-seeking world the noble ideal of selfless service. He protested against the evils of caste-system that hampered the progress of mankind and advocated equal opportunities for all. He declared that the gates of deliverance were open to all, in every condition of life, high or low, saint or sinner, who would care to turn a new leaf and aspire to perfection.

“He raised the status of down-trodden women, and not only brought them to a realization of their importance to society but also founded the first religious order for women. For the first time in the history of the world he attempted to abolish slavery. He banned the sacrifice of unfortunate animals and brought them within his compass of loving kindness.

“He did not force his followers to be slaves either to his teachings or to himself, but granted complete freedom of thought and admonished his followers to accept his words not merely out of regard for him but after subjecting them to a thorough examination even as the wise would test gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing it on a piece of touchstone.

“He comforted the bereaved mothers like Patacārā and Kisāgotami by his consoling words. He ministered to the deserted sick like Putigatta Tissa Thera with his own hands. He helped the poor and

the neglected like Rajjumālā and Sopāka and saved them from an untimely and tragic death. He ennobled the lives of criminals like Angulimala and courtesans like Ambapāli.

“He encouraged the feeble, united the divided, enlightened the ignorant, clarified the mystic, guided the deluded, elevated the base, and dignified the noble. The rich and the poor, the saint and the criminal, loved him alike. His noble example was a source of inspiration to all.

“He was the most compassionate and tolerant of teachers. His will, wisdom, compassion, service, renunciation, perfect purity, exemplary personal life, the blameless methods that were employed to propagate the Dhamma and his final success__all these factors have compelled about one fifth of the population of the world to hail the Buddha as the greatest religious teacher that ever lived on earth.

(Narada 30-31)

Paying a glowing tribute to the Buddha, Sri Radhakrishnan writes: 'In *Gautama the Buddha* we have a master mind from the East second to none so far as the influence on the thought and life of the human race is concerned, and sacred to all as the founder of a religious tradition whose hold is hardly less wide and deep than any other. He belongs to the history of the world's thought, to the general inheritance of all cultivated men, for, judged by intellectual integrity, moral earnestness, and spiritual insight, he is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures in history.’ (Gautama the Buddha 1)

In the *Three Greatest Men in History*, H. G. Wells states:

'In the Buddha you see clearly a man, simple, devout, lonely, battling for light, a vivid human personality, not a myth. He too gave a message to mankind universal in character. Many of our best modern

ideas are in closest harmony with it. All the miseries and discontents of life are due, he taught, to selfishness. Before a man can become serene he must cease to live for his senses or himself. Then he merges into a greater being.' ...

“A humble follower of the Buddha would modestly say:

*The more I know Him, the more I love Him;
the more I love Him, the more I know Him.”*

(Narada 32)

Reference

Narada Thera. 1998. *The Buddha and his Teachings*. Taipei: Corporate Body of the Buddhist Educational Foundation.