

**WHY I ADORE
GAUTAMA BUDDHA**

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It is customary for the Institute to bring out periodically scripts of important lectures delivered under its auspices in the form of "Transactions", for wider dissemination among the public. The present publication is based on a lecture delivered by Shri Ramachandran at the Institute during May 1996. We trust it will be well received by the reading public.

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WHY I ADORE GAUTAMA BUDDHA

About six decades ago, when I was still in my teens, a good friend of mine presented me with a copy of Sir Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia." He could not have given me a present of more lasting impact I was thrilled to learn from this for the first time the main incidents in the life of Gautama Buddha and his timeless message to humanity. The lyrical charm of Arnold's own presentation served to heighten the spell which Gautama Buddha's life cast upon me. I continue to be under the chastening spell of this great and pacific life to this day.

In this paper, Gautama Buddha is referred to basically as a MAN, a very extra-ordinary man no doubt, but still a man. Among Hindus there are many who believe that God Vishnu, who had earlier incarnated as Sri Rama in the *Treta Yuga* and as Sri Krishna in the *Dwapara Yuga*, incarnated again in this *Kali Yuga* as Gautama Buddha. Jayadeva in his *Gita Govinda* has referred to the spreading of mercy as the main mission of the *Buddha Avatar - Karunyam Atanvate*. Though Gautama Buddha himself did not expect to be deified, and though he had made it abundantly clear even when he was on the threshold of *Nirvana* that what he could achieve was achievable by others too, there are millions of people who continue to worship him with reverence and devotion as "*Bhagavan*". If you look upon a character as God incarnate, then all the trials and tribulations experienced during the *avatar* seem a kind of stage play. In the bargain, we may even miss the main message of the *avatar*. It is for this reason that Gautama Buddha is viewed in this paper as a man, and not as *Bhagavan* or *avatar* of Vishnu.

I also wish to clarify at the outset that the main thrust in this presentation would be on the life of Gautama Buddha and not on the religion that developed in his lame after him. Reference to Buddhist tenets cannot obviously be avoided in a paper on Buddha's life, but these would only be incidental, I am attempting to maintain the focus throughout on the extra-ordinary person of Gautama Buddha. I am in no position to deal with the many subtle differences in interpretation that later crept in amongst various schools of Buddhist thought.

The main incidents of the life of Gautama Buddha are generally well-known. We shall, however, recapitulate them briefly. Although there are differences among the *pundits* regarding the dates of Gautama Buddha's birth and death, there is overwhelming evidence to establish that we are here dealing with a historical character, and not one drawn from the realms of mythology. According to an inscription in Bodh Gaya, Buddha's *pari nirvana* (death) occurred in 544 B.C. All schools of Buddhist thought agreed to observe on the full moon day in *Baisakh* (May) in 1956 the 2500th anniversary of the *mahaparinirvana* of Gautama Buddha. Gautama Buddha lived for exactly 80 years. His date of birth was also the full moon day in *Baisakh* in 624 B.C. We may accept these dates as fairly realistic for our purpose.

Gautama's father was a Sakya king by name Suddhodana, ruling over a place called Kapilavastu at the foot of the Himalayas. His queen, Mayadevi, had a natural desire to go to her parents' place, Devadaha, at the time of Gautama's birth. *En route* at a beautiful spot called Lumbini she expressed a desire to rest for a while. It was at this spot, in a sylvan grove of *sal* trees that a male child was born to her on the full moon day of *Baisakh* in 624 B.C. A monument raised by Emperor Asoka some 250 years later can still be seen at this place. The new arrival was named Siddhartha, Gautama being the name of his clan (*gotram*).

An old and prophetic sage called Asita on seeing the child exhibited mixed feelings of joy and sorrow - joy because the child was going to become a great saviour of mankind,

and sorrow because he himself would not be alive to see that happening. Within a week of Siddhartha's birth, Mayadevi peacefully paid her last debt to nature. The child was brought up by Mayadevi's sister, Maha Prajapati Gautami, who also became Siddhartha's stepmother.

Suddhodana was troubled by Asita's prophecy. He feared that Siddhartha might take to *sanyas*, in order to save humanity. With a view to avoiding such a seeming calamity, he made sure that Siddhartha had a sheltered life. He took special pains to avoid Siddhartha's exposure to the seamy aspects of human life.

Even as a child, Siddhartha astounded his teachers by his precocious knowledge, combined with an exemplary attitude of reverence towards his teachers. As age advanced, Siddhartha began to show signs of his spiritual inclinations. For example, while riding a horse, he would lag behind his peers, if he felt that the horse was getting tired. While hunting like others of his class, he would deliberately allow deer to escape.

Once, while he was sitting alone in a garden, he saw a flying swan fall into the ground, shot by an arrow from his cousin Devadatta. Siddhartha tenderly caressed the frightened swan and relieved it of its pain. Devadatta came to the spot claiming that the bird should be surrendered to him, dead or alive. Siddhartha stated that the bird belonged to him that saved its life and not to him who sought to kill it. He was, however, willing to abide by the verdict of the wise. An unknown priest ruled that as the saviour of life Siddhartha had far greater claim on the living bird than Devadatta. One can appreciate here (the willingness of Siddhartha to submit the matter in dispute to impartial arbitration, instead of seeking settlement through brute force.

With a view to getting Siddhartha increasingly entangled in worldly affairs, Suddhodana arranged for his marriage with a lovely girl, Yasodhara. Here again it is interesting to note that at the time of his marriage with Yasodhara, Siddhartha showed that, despite his spiritual predilections, he was second to none in such martial skills as riding and fencing. The marriage of Siddhartha with Yasodhara was blessed by the birth of a son, who was named Rahula.

In the meanwhile, all the efforts of Suddhodana to keep Siddhartha amused by singing and dancing girls went in vain. Siddhartha expressed a desire to go round the city. Suddhodana had no alternative but to agree. He issued strict instructions that the city should be gaily decorated and that Siddhartha's eyes should not be allowed to descend on any kind of scene likely to cause sorrow or unhappiness. In spite of Suddhodana's instructions, Siddhartha saw a withered old man with shriveled skin and fleshless bones, a person stricken by an ugly disease, followed by a dead body on the last journey to the crematorium. He later saw an ascetic walking along the road with peace writ large on his brows. The first three scenes made Siddhartha feel miserable. But he was impressed by the ascetic and felt like conversing with him. The ascetic told Siddhartha : "This *sansara* is full of sorrow. I am renouncing this in quest of liberation." That kindled in Siddhartha the desire to embark on a similar life of renunciation. He pondered deeply over the miseries of existence and on finding a way out of them. One fine night, when he was 29 years old, he left his sleeping wife and son and drove away out of the city along with a devoted attendant named Chenna. Siddhartha rode away from the city towards a forest, discarded his royal robes, cut his long hair and embraced the life of an ascetic, after sending back to Kapilavastu a weeping Chenna.

Siddhartha began trekking from place to place in search of knowledge. In other words, he became a *parivrajaka*. He eventually reached one of the five hills surrounding Rajagriha ruled

by Bimbisara. It was around here that a sorrowing woman, Kisa Gautami, sought Siddhartha's intervention to save her child who had died of snake-bite. Siddhartha asked the lady that he would rescue her child, provided she brought one *tola* of black mustard from a house where none had died. Kisa Gautami could not obviously find such a house. This was how Siddhartha made the woman reconcile herself to the truth that all beings born must die some time or other. Again, it was around this time that Siddhartha successfully prevented the senseless sacrifice of an innocent goat in the court of King Bimbisara, after invoking on it all the sins of the king. In so doing, Siddhartha expounded the great truth that it is impossible to transfer on another one hair's weight of responsibility for one's own action. We may recall, in this connection, that in the Old Testament too we come across a similar attempt to foist on a poor goat all the sins of Israel. There is no scope for such "scape-goat sacrifices" according to the "fixed arithmetic of the universe," as expounded by Siddhartha.

Though Bimbisara entreated Siddhartha to stay on in Rajagriha, Siddhartha did not agree. He, however, promised to revisit Rajagriha after becoming a Buddha. His quest for knowledge led him to approach two teachers, Adara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra. He learnt certain things from them, but neither could quench fully his thirst for Truth. He then proceeded to Uravila, south of Rajagriha, accompanied by five other monks who chose to follow him. There Siddhartha embarked on severe penance. As was the custom with many others, he mortified his body. After undergoing this experience for some time, he realized that self-torture of the physical body is no way to gain spiritual knowledge. He likened the body to a *Veena* - if the strings are tightened too hard, they snap; if they are left loose, musical notes cannot be had. Likewise, both extremes need to be avoided in the case of the human body. Avoiding over-indulgence on the one hand and self-mortification on the other, we must take the middle path to achieve true spiritual progress. He soon resumed taking normal food through *bhiksha*. The five accompanying monks were disappointed over Siddhartha's transformation. They felt that, at this rate, Siddhartha can never become a Buddha. They left him alone and went to a place near Banaras. Siddhartha, however, continued his quest for knowledge. He ate some nourishing milk pudding given by one Sujatha, daughter of the Chieftain of a nearby village called Senani. One night Siddhartha sat under a Bodhi tree and resolved never to get up from there till he attained his goal. It was again the night of the full moon in the month of *baisakh*. Siddhartha was exactly 35 years old on the day. Suddenly in the night, Siddhartha felt the glow of spiritual enlightenment. He had become a Buddha, the enlightened one. The noted writer Kuvempu in his Kannada play entitled *Maha Ratri* has written thus about the occasion;

“This is a great night;
The night when Siddhartha became Buddha;
The night of descent of divine compassion on earth”¹

Buddha's knowledge consisted of four basic truths about life. These are: (i) Sorrow is (*dukkha*); (ii) each sorrow has a cause (*samudaya*); (iii) it is possible to end sorrow (*nirodha*); there is a way by following which sorrow could be ended (*marga*). Buddha also outlined a Noble Eight-fold Path to reach the goal of *Nirvana* - a state which is beyond all grief, death and defilement. The path consists of right outlook, right will, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right absorption. This is sometimes spoken of as the "*Ladder of Perfection*".

Buddha mulled over the inexplicable bliss of enlightenment for some time. Two passing traders, Tapussa and Bhallika, became his first disciples. Buddha was initially haunted by a

1 “ಇದು ಮಹಾ ರಾತ್ರಿ; ಸಿದ್ಧಾರ್ಥ ಬುದ್ಧನಾಗುವ ರಾತ್ರಿ. ಸಗ್ಗ ದೊಲವಿಳಿಗಿಳಿವ ರಾತ್ರಿ”

doubt whether ordinary people saturated with lust and hatred would ever care to listen to him. He soon realised, however, that unless the fruits of his enlightenment were dispersed widely, people, by and large, would never be able to get out of the nit of misery. Swayed by deep compassion and a warm heart for suffering humanity, he resolved to proclaim the basic tenets of his simple *dharma* to the .best of his ability. He did this with extraordinary zeal and devotion for the rest of his life. He first sought his former teachers, Adara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra and found that they were already dead. He then sought the five monks who used to accompany him earlier. The monks were sceptical in the beginning, but it did not take them long to discover that die erstwhile Siddhartha had indeed become a Buddha. They at once became his enthusiastic disciples. Very soon, the number of disciples (*Bhikkus*) exceeded sixty. Buddha exhorted them to spread themselves out and broadcast the message of his *dharma* village by village. Buddha himself returned to Senani village and from there to Rajagriha to redeem his earlier promise to Bimbisara. Bimbisara was the first big ruler to become Buddha's devoted disciple. He gifted a nearby place called *Venu vana* for the use of Buddha and his Sangha.

For full 45 years, Buddha trudged from place to place, reiterating the message of his "Middle Path" which, in a nutshell, is expressed in the following verse taken from the *Dhammapada*:

"Eschew all evil. Cultivate and establish thyself in good. Cleanse thy mind. So teach the Buddhas." (183)

Amongst his many disciples were personages belonging to the royal families (including his father Suddhodana and his son rahula), Bramhins, Kshatriyas, those whom we would now call members of the scheduled castes, people who were rich and people who were poor. He would not shut the doors of his Sangha even to a courtesan like Amrapali.

It is not feasible to chronicle in this paper all that Buddha did during these 45 years. Only a few important points are being highlighted.

A quarrel once arose between the Shakyas and the Koliyas over the sharing of water in the river Rohini separating their territories. Buddha was successful in satisfactorily settling the issue and preventing outbreak of violence on this score. How we wish Buddha were with us now to settle our dispute with Tamilnadu over the sharing of the Kaveri water!

After Suddhodana's death, his wife Mahaprajapati Gautami (Buddha's step-mother) wanted to join the Sangha. Buddha initially declined. Later on, he was prevailed upon to admit a cadre of women too in the Sangha.

Buddha's passionate pleas for peace were severely tested when a Kosala prince, Vidudabha, marched his troops into Kapilavastru and put to sword almost the whole of the Sakya clan. This must have caused Buddha tremendous distress. Still, he did not lose heart and kept on preaching that hatred shall not cease by hatred but by love.

Buddha's cousin Devadatta, who in his earlier years already had a tiff with Buddha (Siddhartha as he then was) became increasingly jealous of Buddha's popularity and attempted to get him out of the way. An elephant doped with drink was let loose on Buddha. It is said that the elephant, far from causing him any harm, kneeled in front of him in reverence. As a matter of fact, Devadatta only happened to predecease Buddha.

When Buddha was eighty years old, he knew his life was at an end. At a place called Pava, he had his last meal with a blacksmith called Chanda. Something he ate at Chanda's place did not agree with him and caused him dysentery. Still, Buddha continued his march to a place

called Kusinagara as planned. There in a beautiful grove, he asked Ananda to spread a cloth between two *sal* trees. Even as he was born in a grove of *sal* trees eighty years earlier, Buddha breathed his last at Kushinagar on *Baisakh poornima* in 544 B.C. peacefully lying between two *sal* trees in the presence of several monks who had assembled there to get a glimpse of him. Thus *Baisakh shudh Poornima* is a “Three-in-one” festival for lovers of Buddha. It is the anniversary day of his birth, of his enlightenment and finally of his death (*mafia paranirvana*);

It may be noted that Buddha had a natural and peaceful death, despite his trenchant criticism of certain practices and rituals which were in vogue at that time. Under fairly comparable circumstances, Socrates in ancient Greece was charged with “corrupting the youth” and had to die as penalty by consuming a deadly poison called hemlock. Jesus again was obliged to die on the cross, because of his criticism of certain Judaic customs and practices.

Having traversed the main incidents in (he life of Gautama Buddha, I shall now attempt to indicate why I adore him, which is the main theme of this paper.

Of all the great prophets of the world, Gautama Buddha is perhaps the only one whose motivation of universal compassion and love sprung from within. Born with a silver spoon in his mouth in a royal family, Siddharatha voluntarily and without any outside, pro vocation forsook all the opulence of the. material world in order to be able to free one and all from the many ills to which human flesh is heir. His compassion was so universal that it covered all ranks of society. He accommodated in his Sangha persons belonging to all castes, high as well as low. In fact, he did not recognize the rigid caste system at all. His views on caste have been tellingly expressed by Sir Edwin Arnold in these memorable words: “ There is no caste in blood,

Which runneth of one hue, nor caste in tears?
Which trickle salt with all; neither comes man
To birth with tilka-mark stamped on his brow,
Nor sacred thread on neck. Who doeth right deed
Is twice-born, and who doeth ill deeds vile.”

Buddha also stated on one occasion that just as all rivers lose their separate identities when they flow into the sea, all castes too lose their identities when devotees join his sangha.

I seldom lose an opportunity to express my firm view that the Indian caste system today is an unmitigated curse which is eating into the vitals of our nation. If only we had hearkened to Buddha’s words touching on caste 25 centuries ago, what a great nation we would have been today! It may also be recalled in this connection that it is the canker of casteism principally that led .the late Baba Saheb Ambedkar to embrace Buddhism in the evening of his life.

Buddha’s compassion not only covered members of all castes and communities, but also those sections of society who were disadvantageous^ placed. From early childhood, his heart bled for the poor sweating peasants arduously working in the fields. He had thus an egalitarian streak in his blood which I find highly adorable. Once he had accepted hospitality from a courtesan Amrapali. Soon thereafter the ruler of Lichchavi approached Buddha offering him hospitality for the same day. Buddha had no hesitation in declining the ruler’s offer, in view of his prior commitment to Amrapali.

Another highly adorable quality in Buddha was the extra-ordinary courage with which he blended his other endearing traits like gentleness and tenderness. Let us recall the Angulimala episode in his life. Angulimala was a dreaded robber and an assassin. He was

supposed to strut around with a garland made of the fingers of the victims of his assassinations. When Buddha wanted to enter the forest which was the abode of Angulimala, his disciples struck a note of caution and tried their best to dissuade their Master from taking any such step, fraught, as it was with danger to person. Disregarding the advice of his disciples, Buddha did enter the forest unmindful of the hazard involved, and was eventually successful in bringing about a change of heart in Angulimala. How Angulimala was transformed by Buddha, into a "*Karunamala*" is feelingly dramatised in a Kannada play written by Dr. Prabhushankara.

We must not forget that Buddha offered way of spiritual development, and not a creed or a set of doctrines. In presenting his way, he was far from being dogmatic. His approach was verily the approach of an unbiased rationalist. Look at the way he advised the Kalamas of Kesaputta, when they felt bewildered by disputes among the *pundits*:

“Now Kalamas, do not ye go by hearsay, not by what is handed down by others, not by what people say, not by what is stated on authority of your traditional teachings..... But, Kalamas, when you know of yourself ‘These teachings are not good; they are blameworthy; they are contemned by the wise. When followed out and put into practice conduce to loss and suffering - then reject them.’”²

Buddha’s reaction to adverse criticism reveals once again how fair, broad-minded and enlightened he was. Once it was brought to his notice that he was being continually derided by one Supriya, Buddha's disciples were naturally upset over Supriya’s criticism. With reference to this, Buddha advised his disciples thus at a public hall in Ambalathika:

“If others speak against me, or against my religion, or against my Older, there is no reason why you should be angry, discontented or displeased with them. If you are so, you will not only bring yourself into danger of spiritual loss, but you will not be able to judge whether what they say is correct or not.”

How very relevant is this advice even today, after the lapse of over 2500 years since these words were spoken!

Another adorable aspect of Buddha’s character is the way he projected his *dharma*. He never made any claims to originality. After he became enlightened, he used to refer to himself in the third person as a *Tathagata* - one who follows the footsteps of his illustrious predecessors. This is how he put across his *dharma* among his disciples;

“...Even so, brethren, have I seen an ancient tract, traversed by the perfectly Enlightened Ones of former times. And what is that Path? It is this Ariyan Eight-fold path.”³

2 Anguttara Nikaya I, p. 188 - Woodward's translation.

3 Samyatta Nikaya II, p. 104 Woodward's translation!

The idea put across is that, in the course of Cosmo genesis, Buddhas make their appearance from time to time to reiterate lost ancient truths. This is reminiscent of Krishna's statement in the *Gita*:

“...and thus I incarnate from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of righteousness.”

Bhikshu Sangharakshmita has clarified this point beyond doubt in these words:

“... the Buddha's discovery of the way to *Nirvana* is held to be a rediscovery, and his Proclamation of the *dharma* a reproclamation. His teaching, far from being original, is new only in the sense it is never out-of-dale”

Buddha's message is thus timeless, *akalika, sanatoria*.

A very important point to be borne in mind in this connection is that Buddha's concept of *Dharma* does not envisage governance by an anthropomorphic God, who takes sides in our struggles and keeps some happy, others miserable; some healthy, others diseased; some rich, others poor. The cardinal underlying principle is that nothing can happen in this world without a cause and that there can be none who can escape from the consequences of one's action. This is the eternal, inexorable Law. There is no Deity apart from Law. Law and the Law-Giver are one and the same. Nor is this a fatalistic doctrine. On the contrary, the key to salvation lies in our own hands. As quoted by Sir Edwin Arnold:

“Within yourselves deliverance must be sought;
Each man his prison makes.”

How Buddha, even before he had become the Enlightened One, struck at the root of the concept of vicarious atonement has already been mentioned with reference to the priests' idea of transferring on a goat all the sins of Bimbisara, the King. We cannot bribe the Gods by meat or drink or fruit. Once, when a Brahmin informed Buddha that he wanted to purify himself by having a bath in Gaya, Buddha advised:

“If you are kind to all, speaketh not false,
killeth no life, taketh not What is not
given to thee, secure in self-denial-
what would you gain by going to Gaya?
Any water is Gaya water.”

It is a matter for deep satisfaction to us that the majestic Wheel of Law - the *Dharma Chakra* - has been incorporated in our national flag. At the same time, it is also a matter for sadness that the lesson of the *Dharma Chakra* seems to have been lost among many holding positions of authority in our body politic. They must remember that for any wrong done, “equal retribution must be made, though *Dharma* tarry long”.

One more reason why I am a confirmed adorer of Buddha is the simplicity of his personal living. Buddha and extravagance are indeed a contradiction in terms. I wish to mention in this connection one seemingly small incident in his life. Once, the Prince of Bhargadesh invited Buddha to visit his new palace. In honour of Buddha, the stairs leading to the palace had been covered with white cloth. This is reminiscent of the “red carpet

welcome” usually extended these days to high visiting dignitaries. Buddha walked upto the stairs, saw the white cloth spread on the stairs and looked back on Ananda. Ananda knew Buddha's mind and advised the prince that Buddha was not prepared to step on the Cloth and asked him to get the cloth removed. Thereafter, Buddha walked on the stairs, after casting a meaningful glance on his followers behind Is this a small incident? Perhaps it is. But it serves to convey an important lesson on avoidance of needless pomp and show in our day-to-day life. The lesson is especially important for us, living as we do in a country which is among the poorest in the world.

I have so far sought to indicate why I so greatly adore Gautama Buddha. I shall now take courage in both hands and venture to touch on two points where I am not able to see eye to eye with Buddha.

One is with regard to Buddha's attitude towards women. I have already referred to Buddha's initial reluctance to admit women to (he Sangha. When he finally accorded clearance to admitting a cadre of women too to the Sangha, he told his devoted friend Ananda that “the Law would stand fast only for some five hundred years. Otherwise, the good law would have stood fast for a thousand years.” Here, we see a regrettable expression of gender bias on the part of die Enlightened One. It is true that, as observed by Sir S. Radhakrishnan, Buddha “was born, grew up and died a Hindu”. He could not have, therefore, been impervious to the dictum in *Manu Dharma Sastra* that a woman should always be under (he protection of father, husband or son and that at no stage does she merit independence in living. Whatever Manu may have said, can it justify discrimination against women? I think not I am of the firm view that, at the spiritual level, there can be no distinction between men and women.

The other point I wish to touch upon is the distorted emphasis on begging shown by the Enlightened One. Those admitted to the Sangha were apparently expected not to own a thing of their own. Inevitably, they had to depend on alms from others for their living. Once a *zamindar* called Bharadwaj did question Buddha on this issue. He said: “I sow seed and reap harvests after considerable endeavour and (hen only I eat my bread. Is it right for you to eat bread without doing any work therefor?” Buddha is said to have replied: “I too have sown seed and am therefore entitled to eat... My operations are different. They are based on sustaining *Dharma* and ultimately I reap peace of mind as the harvest/’ Bharadwaj was apparently satisfied by Buddha's explanation, and later became his devoted disciple. But I still have my doubts in regard to the advisability of resenting to begging as a way of life. In the Hindu tradition, of which Buddha was a part, begging is woven in .the fabric of life on many occasions. For example, at the time of *upanayanam*, the young *bramhachari* (*vatu*) is expected to beg of some women saying: “*Bhavati, bhikshan dehi.*” Whatever might have been the pattern of living in those days, it seems anachronistic to foster begging for any reason, having regard to the ethos of modem times. In an essay on “Humanism .in Islam”, Prof. Sheik Ali has quoted a Sufi mystic as saying; “A full Muslim is one who.... goes about earning his daily bread, and having earned it, keeps half for himself and gives the other half to the needy.”

It is obvious that for a person engaged in mission work, k would be a waste of time if he were obliged to work as well for his living. It is the duty of society to look after such savants. At the same time, the thought of any one going round for alms with a begging bowl in the hand fills me with a certain revulsion. Maybe it is some kind of vanity within which makes me feel so. The least I wish to say is that it is not a happy sight to see any one in the world go round with a begging bowl.

Despite these two twin reservations, my adoration for Buddha continues to remain unbounded. He has shown us a way of life free from senseless ritualism and given us a *dharma* Which is eminently acceptable as a fountain of spiritual life. His admirably simple recipe for day-to-day conduct is beautifully expressed by Swami Vivekananda in these words: "Do good and be good. And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is." Buddha deliberately avoided involvement in sterile metaphysical speculations on the nature of consciousness in Nirvana, etc.

My adoration and reverence for Buddha is not based on *His* attaining *Nirvana* through tremendous self-effort. Not content with the right to enter *Nirvana* for himself, Buddha, in his infinite love for humanity, applied himself with unremitting zeal to the task of clearing the path to *Nirvana* for ordinary mortals like us. It is for this supreme renunciation *par excellence* that I salute Buddha the most

Before closing, I wish to invite attention to an important statement in a book of devotion called the "*Voice of the silence*" The statement reads: "Look inward, thou art Buddha." What does this signify? To my mind it signifies that while Gautama Buddha may have passed away in 544 B.C., the "Buddha spirit" is latent in every one of us, which is nothing but the spirit of universal love and compassion. It is up to us to kindle the latent "Buddha spirit" within us. If we do so, it is certain to make us better and nobler citizens and make our world a far better place to live than it is today.