

Chapter 4

Sorrow and Suffering

The world is a court of trial. From birth to death all along there is misery of one kind or another. It is so for most men and women for most of the time. Meanwhile, all struggle, more or less, to lessen or shorten sorrow. None succeed; few only hope to.

The ancient remedy was religion and prayer. Modern remedy is science and technology, which are to an extent allied with politics and economics and a host of other grim and grand mechanisms. Yet our modern world has been swinging to more and more misadventure and misfortune.

Ancient India readily set out on a bold adventure of the spirit. The Veda and the Upanisad led the way. Rosy belief prevailed. When life is in bloom it is naturally gay and gracious. Spring of joy, then, keep playing. Sorrow is simply laughed at. Indian soul at the time was in a flowering festivity. The Upanisad pulsed with joy of life.

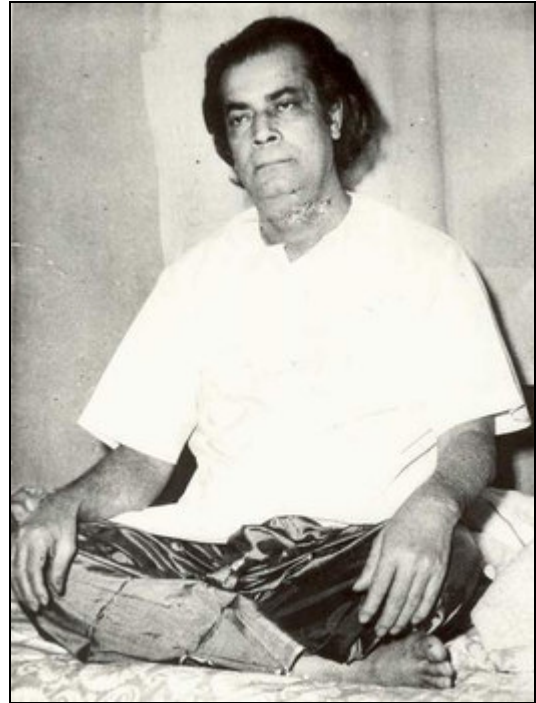
Bright new idea is a gift of youth. Bold belief belongs to daring youth. The Upanisad was the musing of a spring time of budding youth. As the first flames of fresh life were about to fade away, the vision of joy grew pale. Dim shadows of sorrow eclipsed life. The movement of higher mind began to go under and fall off. In fact, a person cannot remain too long on too high a plane. A coming down is only a matter of time. At such time of torpor, philosophies wearily wheel around the corners of doubt, decay and dismay. By now, the era of the first twelve great Upanisads was over. Then a deflowering of quality set in. Original thinking was replaced by combative commentaries.

As life force was enfeebled, people fell into moody meditation. From now and for long, as Max Muller observes: "The principal systems of philosophy in India start from the conviction that the world is full of suffering and that this suffering should be accounted for and removed."

The credit was that the philosophers had the firmness to keep the field. Before them the Buddha had led the way to attack the problem of pain and peril of life. And though he adopted a little of the Upanisad, he gave an entirely new orientation of the problem and lifted thought to another level, high enough.

Buddha had little interest in God and speculation about the world and the self. His one absorbing thought was given to conquest of sorrow and account for the misery of humanity. Neither a life of physical pleasure and worldly possessions could assure happiness nor would self-torture lead to any positive value. In his view, the right way is to behave with the knowledge that self is the source of suffering. That way is to practice negation of self, to discipline it by the process of nirvana, to annul self altogether. Buddha's main point of difference with the Upanisad was his doctrine of 'no self': nairatmavada.

The road to it was laborious: to pursue Four Noble Truths: That there is suffering, that it has a cause, that it can be abolished, and that it is practicable. The cause of suffering is ignorance (avidya) and desire (tanna). The accomplishment is nirvana, as a result of wisdom (pranjna) and grace (karuna). The Four Truths are supplemented by Eightfold Path: What, O monks, is the Middle Way, which gives sight? It is the noble Eightfold Path, namely: right faith, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, O monks, is the Middle Way. --- The first Sermon.



Dadaji
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The Buddha's prescription of the measure for the cessation of sorrow was given without doubt, for he had Enlightenment, and he had come (Tathagata) to unclouded enlightenment. Buddha's next sermon rang with confidence:

Thus have I heard Once when the Lord was staying at Benares in the deer park, he addressed the almsmen as follows: It is here in this very deer park at Benares that the Truth finder, Arhat, all enlightened, set a rolling the supreme Wheel of the Doctrine which shall not be turned back from its onward course by the recluse of Brahmin, god or Mara or Brahma or by any one in the universe, the announcement of the Four Noble Truths, the teaching, the declaration, and establishment of those Four Truths, with their unfolding exposition and manifestation.

The logic of the Buddha's message is thorough attack on sorrow as the only path to salvation:

Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, sickness is sorrow, clinging to earthly things is sorrow. Birth and rebirth, the chain of reincarnations, result from the thirst for life together with passion and desire. The only escape from this thirst is the annihilation of desire.

--- E.W. Hopkins, *The Religion of India*

Like Jainism, Buddhism was a faith propounded by a Kshatriya prince. In this connection, it may be noted that Kapila was a Kshatriya (Bhagvat Purana, III, xxi, 26). Brhadaranyaka

Upanisad (II, 1, 1) and Kausitaki Brahmana Upanisad (IV, 1) refer to the influence of the Kshatriya. Gargya, a Brahman sage was taught by king Ajatasatru of Kashi. Brhadaranyaka Upanisad (II, 1). Regard for the Kshatriya is given at length in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad (I, 4):

Verily in the beginning this was Brahman, one only. That being one, was not strong enough. It created still further the most excellent Kshatra (power), viz. those kshatras (powers) among the Devas --- Intra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mrityu, Isana. Therefore there is nothing beyond the Kshatra, and therefore at the Rajasuya sacrifice the Brahman sit down below the Kshatraya. He confers that glory on Kshatra alone. ...Law is the Kshatra (power) of the Kshatra; therefore there is nothing higher than the Law.

In the Chandogya Upanisad (1, 8, 1 & V, 3) it is reported that Kshatriya King Javali taught Brahman Gautama. The same Upanisad (V, II) Kshatriya king Asvapati is giving lessons, Satapatha Brahmana (VIII, 1, 4, 10), on the contrary, contemptuously says: "the words of a Kshatriya!" No wonder that the Buddha welcomed aristocrats in his order:

The Buddhist theory acknowledged the equal right of all persons without distinction to be received into the order. Buddha speaks of the highest consummation of religious aspirations, for the sake of which "the sons of noble families (kulaputta) leave their homes and go into homelessness." We find young Brahmins like Sariputta, Moggallana, Kaccana, nobles like Ananda, Ruhula, Anuruddha, sons of the great merchants, invariably men and youths of the most respectable classes of society...

--- H. Oldenberg, *Buddha, His life, His Doctrine, His Order*

Particularly, in the eras when civilization was in the making, the task of construction was naturally left to the higher classes. In ancient Palestine, at the time of the early prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah something like this obtained. The plight of the poor and the oppressed moved the heart of Jeremiah. But not knowing enough of the society and social problems, Jeremiah preferred to leave it to the judgment of the upper class: "But these are poor," I said, "mere ignorant folk, who never learned the rules of the Eternal, of the religion of their God. I will turn to the upper classes; I will talk to them; for they have learned the rules of the Eternal, and the religion of their God." -- Jeremiah, V. 5. (Quoted from Don Martinadale, *Social Life & Cultural Change*, p. 276)

The Buddha was a master of logic, and he adopted what is now well-known as Socratic method, or rather a sort of dialectical thinking. He was learned, too, though he did not use his learning for display. He was earnest, as was Socrates. And he was opposed to the Vedic rites

and rituals. In fact, he shared the outlook of his age that was inclined to rebel against respect for abstract knowledge, orthodox regard for rituals and a genuine compassion for a person in misery. A dialogue of the Buddha will illustrate his keen logical bent of mind. This refers to his discussion with two sages:

Well then, Vasettha, those ancient Rishis of the Brahmans, versed in the three Vedas, the authors of the verse, to wit. Vamadeva, Vessamittha, Jamadaggi, Angirasa, Bharadaja, Vasettha, Kassapa and Bhagu --- did even they speak thus, saying, "We know it, we have seen it, where Brahma is, whence Brahma is, wither Brahma is?" Not so, Gautama. --- *Tevijja Sutta, Digha Nikaya*

And thus in a short time he nonplussed the two Brahmans who submitted to the Buddha. The master's technique was neatly followed by his able disciples. A book of Buddhist tales, named *Milinda-panha*, quotes a dialogue between the Greek King Menander (Milinda) and the monk Nagasena. (the Greek king was defeated by Pushyamitra, 2nd century B.C, who was a fanatic follower of Brahmanism.):

Nagasena: Your majesty, you are a delicate prince, an exceedingly delicate prince.

Pray did you come on foot, or riding?

Milinda: Bhante (revered sire), I do not go on foot, I come in a chariot.

Nagasena: Your majesty, if you came in a chariot, declare to me your chariot. Pray, your majesty, is the pole the chariot?

Milinda: Nay, verily, Bhante.

Nagasena: Is the axle the chariot?

Milinda: Nay, verily, Bhante.

Nagasena: Are the wheels the chariot?

Milinda: Nay, verily, Bhante.

Nagasena: Is the banner staff the chariot?

Milinda: Nay, verily, Bhante.

This way all the parts of the chariot are mentioned.

Nagasena: Is it, then, your majesty, something else besides pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body, banner-staff, yoke, reins, and goad which is the chariot?

Milinda: Nay, verily, Bhante.

Nagasena: Your majesty, although I question you very closely, I fail to discover any chariot. Verily now, your majesty, the word chariot is a mere empty sound. What chariot is there here? Your majesty, you speak a falsehood, a lie: there is not chariot. Now, your majesty, answer if you can.

Milinda: Bhante Nagasena, I spoke no lie. The word chariot is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation and name.

Nagasena: Thoroughly well, your majesty, do you understand a chariot. In exactly the same way, your majesty in respect of me, Nagasena is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation, mere name for the hair of my head, braid of the head, form, sensation, perception, the predispositions and consciousness. But in the absolute sense there is not ego here to be found.

The king profusely admired the monk. The monk had paid the king in the same coin. For, the king, at the beginning of the conversation, had charged the monk in nearly the same strain. Though all this dialogue may not have been at all held, the suggestion of this report is eloquent. At least, it shows the highly metaphysical style of disputations, to prove that neither soul nor matter has any real existence, but it is only a name by which it is comprehended.

As a rule, Buddha did not take interest in dogma. He used to keep silent over debaters on the existence of God or Soul. He liked the Upanisad and under it's influence he loved to remain mystic and only say: "The eye goes not thither nor speech nor mind." (Bhadaranyaka Up., III, 8, 8). Or as the Kena Upanisad says: "It is other than the known and above the unknown." (I, 3) As Lao Tze expresses it at the beginning of his Lao the King: "The Tao which can be expressed is not the unchanging Tao; the Name which can be named is not the unchanging Name."

In the sphere of culture the Brahmans and Buddhists had close rivalry. Competition in cultural activities and educational pursuits gave impetus to building Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries. The monastery of Nalanda is an inspiring instance. The site was purchased by a number of merchants at a cost of ten crores of gold coins, then kings in succession constructed the massive educational institution that accommodated 10,000 students and more than a thousand teachers, in addition to guest houses for visiting scholars. The construction of Jetavana Park in Sravasti reads like a myth of mighty attraction:

When the Buddha accepted Anathpindaka's invitation to visit Sravasti, the latter, seeing a suitable place for the Buddha's residence, discovered this park belonging to Jetakumara. When he asked to be allowed to buy it, Jet'as reply was: 'Not even if you could cover the whole place with money.' Anathpinda had gold brought down in carts and covered Jetavana with pieces laid side by side.

Emperor Asoka proclaimed Buddhism as State religion, and gifts continued to be poured into monasteries. King Kanishka appeared as the last great patron. Likewise, huge Hindu temples were built by devout donations of Kings. However, both the Vedic and the Buddhist religions were the outcomes of the great visions of sages. Naturally two systems will differ; yet great minds work at many times on similar lines. The main conflict was that Buddha was disinclined to bother much about Self. Yet there were important meeting points. For instance, the Pali scripture teaches: "Be such as have the self as your lamp, self as only refuge." (atta-deepa viharatha atta-sarana. --- *Dingha Nikaya*, ii, 101) Buddhist doctrine of no-self --- anatta --- is in fact the denial that the Self is individual, belonging to a particular individual. (This base of agreement is finely discussed by Ananda Coomarsawmi in *Hinduism and Buddhism* as well as by Rhys-Davids in *Outlines of Buddhism*)

The essential point of difference did not lie so much in the general doctrine of no-self, but in Buddha's refusal to make this the pivot of religious faith. In his view the vital matter of religion was that the individual was a prey to misery and the tears of the individual worried him. In his view, religion's primary task was to wipe out the individual's tears. Buddha as Lord of compassion (karuna) reminds one of Jesus Christ. The one difference was that Buddha was not condemned by any court to be killed and he escaped anything like crucifixion, because India had tolerance as a habit of religion. What was odd about religion in India was the conduct of disputation. A supporter of a view at the very start imagines the presence of an opposer (purvapaksha). The individual begins with positing the opposition points and then proceeds to smash the objections and establishes a thesis (siddhanta). This process hardens rivalry.

Human sorrow and suffering took the Christ on the cross. With the Buddha this human tragedy weighed most though he was spared from solving it in his own person. Soul untouched by sorrow seemed to him to be a fine-spun mysticism. The situation may be clarified by an extract from Radhakrishnan who things that salvation is not to be limited to a few. The ordeal of redeeming is endless, as every individual is to be redeemed:

The Hindus assert different degrees of liberation, but the complete and final release of all is the ultimate one. Mahayana Buddhism declares that the Buddha ascending on the threshold of nirvana took the vow never to make the irrevocable crossing so long as there was a single undelivered being on earth. The Bhagvata Purana records the following prayer: "I desire not the supreme state with all its eight perfections nor the release from rebirth; may I assume the sorrow of all creatures who suffer and enter into them so that they may be made free from grief." The self-fulfillment which they aspire to is inconsistent with the failure to achieve similar results in others.

--- Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy

Buddha was modest about his unbelief in God, but quite outspoken in his disregard for the Veda and the Vedic rituals. A furious and forthright denunciation of God as well as the Veda came from Carvaka. He was spiteful against religion of any kind. In ancient usage, the word nastika meant an unbeliever in the Veda; only later, it meant defamation of God. Carvaka was a total nastika. His doctrine is called *Lokayata*. It meant belief in the material world, that this world is all and that there is nothing beyond this. God, soul and all abstract things like that he frankly

rejected. What he vehemently recommended was: enjoy heartily and unhesitatingly all that this world offers. *Lokayata* may also mean what the people prefer, when they are free from the priestly control. His doctrine may have been originally formulated by Braspati, who as been mentioned by Buddha.

Carvaka is a very popular name in our philosophy. His extreme godlessness and absolute abandonment to love of life must have been some honest sage's holy anger at hypocrisy preached in the name of religion. A few of his refrains are well worth knowing:

While life is yours, live joyously;
None can escape Death's searching eye'
When once this frame of ours they burn,
How shall it ever again return?

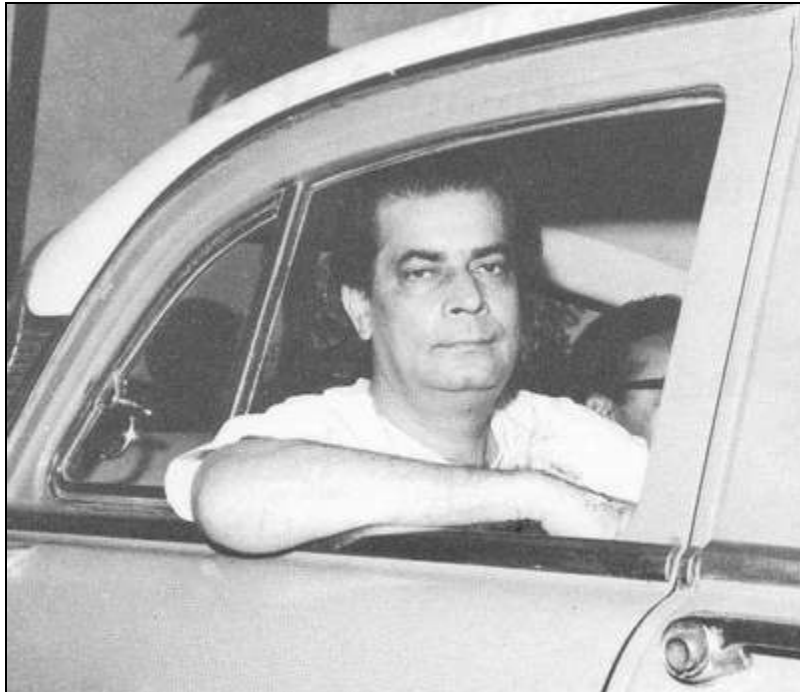
Here is a precept quoted from the first teacher of this school of chivalrous materialism:

The Agnihotra, the three Vedas, the ascetic's three staves,
And smearing oneself with ashes, ---
Brhaspati says these are but beans of livelihood for those
who have no manliness or sense.

Sarvasiddhanta Samgraha carries this instruction:

There is no world other than this; there is no heaven and
no hell. The realms of Siva and like regions are invented
by stupid imposters of other schools of thought.

To denounce the Veda as humbug, the priest as a professional mountebank, god as a queer faction, was probably a demand of the time. Certainly, Carvaka must have possessed sharp intellect and a righteous passion for telling the truth against a whole existing order that was yet in its indisputable power. One issue emerges clearly. It is that Carvaka as a philosopher had created an orbit of influence. At least, he had made an impression on some reformers who rebelled against Brahmanic formulas. For instance, the Jain school did not subscribe to the belief in God and Vedic sacrifices. Of course, the Jain creed is sober and sweeter, and unlike the Lokayata, it holds that the essence of soul is imperishable and that spirit has its reality.



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