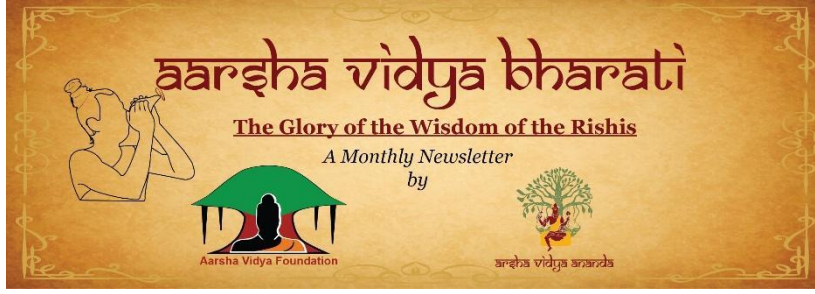

Aarsha Vidya Bharati - June 2024

Jyeshtha - Ashadha 2081

A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



This is one of many articles from our monthly newsletter. Access the [june 2024 issue](#) or read any of [the articles](#).

Dharmam Śaraṇam Gacchāmi



Outside a Buddhist monastery near Siddhabari (2016)

In the few days approaching Buddha Purnima, there was a quiet air of festivity, in the lanes of Kandy, Sri Lanka. Locals dressed in white would make their way to the different Buddhist temples and monasteries lit up with golden lights, flower and food offerings in hand with a peaceful air. Since the relic of the tooth of Shakyamuni or Gautama Buddha had been preserved, the Temple of the Tooth was a place of pilgrimage. While speaking with the locals, I asked them how they celebrated Buddha Purnima. From what they said, three things struck me –

1. The Buddhists prayed for the highest i.e. Nirvana, liberation from a sense of bondage.
2. The Buddhists renewed their vow of adhering to Dharma for the rest of the year.

-
3. They sought blessings from the monks and contributed generously to the monasteries.

This got me thinking about Hinduism, our Hindu festivals and our connection to Buddhism.

For many of us, Buddha is the one who peacefully smiles at us from designer homes, hotel lobbies, spas as his meditative posture evokes a peace and calm for all who see it.

‘Buddha’ literally means ‘The Enlightened One’ in Sanskrit and so it can serve as a prefix for any wise person who has discovered the ultimate reality. By convention, it has come to refer to Gautam Buddha or Shakya Muni.

Although Buddha was not a Buddhist but a Hindu prince, Buddhism became a separate religion based on the teachings written by his disciples. Buddha never declared that he was starting a new religion.

Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism as three ancient Indian religions emerged as offshoots of Hinduism, sharing some common spiritual roots while also diverging in significant ways.

Buddhism and Jainism are considered *Nāstika darśana*-s as they do not recognise the validity of the Vedas as a means of knowledge nor do they have an idea of *Īśvara*. The highest being is the Buddha himself, the wise one for Buddhists and the Tirthankara (24 of them) for the Jains.

Hinduism, being the oldest of the three, provided the foundational ideas and practices. These include the belief in *karma* (the law of cause and effect), the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsāra*), and the ultimate goal of liberation from this cycle (*mokṣa* or nirvana). They also share a belief in the efficacy of spiritual practices such as meditation, yoga, and asceticism as a means to gain enlightenment.

While the vision of reality might be different, all three traditions are considered *Dhārmika* traditions which consider the foundation of all living as *dharma* – the moral and ethical principles that govern the universe and guide individual behaviour.

It is amazing that for centuries, followers of these religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism have continued to co-exist with harmony largely in India. The primary reason is that all are *Dhārmika* traditions.

Coming back to Hinduism and reflecting on our prayers – Since we have so many wise beings as saints, whose *Jayanti*-s, birthdays are celebrated, do we pray for learning and wisdom on those days? Or is it just looked upon as a holiday to combine with the weekend and take a vacation?

Since a lot of our festivals celebrate the triumph of *Dharma* over *Adharma*, are we reminded of how best we can serve *Dharma* by our *karma* in our many roles? Or do we get lost only in the associated legends and the feasting after the *pūjā*-s?

What is our aligning with *Dharma* based on? Convenience or commitment? Upholding the values of *satyam* (truthfulness), *ahimsā* (non-harming), *dayā* (compassion), *asteya* (non-stealing) etc can be a commitment. One tries one's best to align with *Dharma* at all times. There will be days that one stumbles and yet one does not give up the highest universal framework of living – *Dharma*. What else but *Dharma* guides the behaviour of the wise and the otherwise person?

Dharmam Śaraṇam Gacchāmi (I seek refuge in *Dharma*)

With love and prayers,

Brahmavidananda
Brahmaprajnananda

(Picture taken in 2016 near Siddhabari, in a Buddhist monastery where the monks were debating. The debate was between a Challenger, standing and asking questions, and a Defender, sitting and answering those questions.)