

**Bhikkhu Ananda**  
*Maha Bodhi Society, Bangalore*

## **THE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO THE SCRIPTURES**

Buddhist holy scriptures are based on Buddha-vacana, Word of the Buddha, which flows from the 'Enlightenment' (Bodhi) of the Buddha.

The original scriptures are in Pali and later they were translated into Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, Korean and Japanese. Hereunder it is dealt with the Pali Scriptures which forms the basis for all other schools.

The two main divisions of the Pali Literature are (1) the Canonical or Pitaka Literature; and (2) the Extra-canonical or Anupitaka Literature. The Anupitaka Literature can again be divided into two: one, the Anupali or works centred around the Pali canon, and two, works based on mixed themes, religious and secular.

### **The Canonical Literature**

The Pali Canon is divided into three collections called Pitakas, i.e., Baskets; hence the name Ti-Pitaka - Three Baskets. The metaphor 'basket' is significant since it refers to something which 'hands down' or 'passes on' things from one to another, like earth in an excavation work, and not something in which to store things, i.e., a crate, for instance. In other words, that which passes on a 'living thing' or a 'tradition of holy living' to posterity. This meaning accentuates Buddha's rejection of authoritarianism in any form. The Buddhists do not believe that the Tipitaka is an unquestionable 'revealed authority' (agamappamanam) like the Veda, the Bible, the Koran etc., The Tipitaka is a guide to enlightenment albeit a sacred guide, as it hands down the 'Way'.

The Three Pitakas are the Vinaya Pitaka, the Sutta Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka. The Vinaya Pitaka contains the Rules of the order (Sangha), the Sutta Pitaka the Discourses on the Teaching (Dhamma) of the Buddha, and the Abhidhamma Pitaka contains the analytical expositions of the psychological and philosophical systems on which the Teaching is based.

Before surveying the contents of the canonical literature it is necessary to know its origin and authenticity, i.e., how it has been handed down to us.

### **Systematisation of the Canon**

It is evident from various references that in the very lifetime of the Master (Sathhā) His Teachings have been systematically collected and carefully classified under different heads. In the Udāna we find the following reference: Bhikkhu Sona who had been a monk only for a year had arrived to meet the Buddha after a long and tiresome journey. During the interview the Buddha said this to him: 'Be so good, monk, as to recite the Dhamma'. "Very well, Lord," said the Venerable Sona in obedience to the Exalted One, and recited from memory the Sixteen Sections of the Eights in full (i.e., the 4th Section of the Sutta Nipāta). When the Venerable Sona had finished his recital, the Exalted One appreciated by saying: "Well done, monk! Well got by heart, well considered and reflected on, monk, are these Sixteen Sections of the Eights. You are blest with charming voice, distinctly and clearly enunciated, so as to make your meaning clear. How many Vassa (rains) have you spent, monk?" "Only one, Lord".

### **The First Great Council (Pathama Sangiti)**

Just after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha, when many bhikkhus were still mournful, the sad situation arose which compelled the then leading Thera, Venerable Mahakassapa, together with other senior Theras, to decide upon convening immediately a Council of Recitals (Dhamma Sangiti) to preserve the Teachings of the Master in its pristine purity. He chose five hundred such Arahats (Realized Saints), who had absolute mastery over the Buddha-vacana, being endowed with the rare supernormal power known as Patisambhidā Ñāṇa, and informed the King of Magadha, Ajatasattu, of this decision. King Ajatasattu, lay-follower of the Buddha, built a large pandal outside Sattapanni cave and made all other arrangements for the council to meet. Thus three months after the Great Demise (Mahaparinibbana), five hundred of the pre-eminent Arahats Disciples of the Buddha met at Rajagaha and recited the entire Teaching of the Buddha for seven months. The Venerable Mahakassapa presided

over this unique Synod, known as the First Great Council (Pathama Dhamma Sangayana). The Venerable Upali Thera, whom the master Himself had placed as the authority on Vinaya, recited section by section with all historical details the whole of the Vinaya Pitaka. The Venerable Ananda Thera, who was likewise recognized as the Treasurer of the Doctrine (Dhamma Bhanḍāgārika), recited the entire Dhamma which included the Sutta Pitaka and the Mātika or Abhidhamma Pitaka. Thus, the collation, begun in the Master's own time, came to be fixed, once for all, in the First Sangāyana by the immediate and distinguished senior holy disciples of the Buddha. This Sacred Canon has handed down most faithfully the inheritance up to the present time by a long line of 'Teacher to pupil'.

### **The Second Great Council**

A hundred years after the Parinibbana of the Exalted One, a Second Council was held at Vesali, the capital of the Vajji Republic, in which the Sacred Canon was once again recited for 8 months and its authenticity re-affirmed by seven hundred Arahats endowed with Patisambhidā Nāṇa, under the presidentship of the Venerable Sabbakami Maha Thera.

### **The Third Great Council**

Two hundred and twenty years after the Parinibbana of the Buddha, the Third Council was held under the patronage of the great Buddhist Emperor Asoka at Pataliputra (Patna), in which one thousand Arahats endowed with supernormal attainments recited the entire 'Word of the Buddha' for nine months. This Council was presided over by Asoka's Guru, the Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa.

### **The Fourth Great Council**

Through the efforts of the Arahats Mahinda, the Buddha-sasana became firmly rooted in the soil of Lanka (Ceylon). And both, the bhikkhus and the kings in the successive generations worked actively to promote the cause of Dhamma. A hundred and twenty five years after Mahinda, Ceylon was thrown into a turmoil of war, famine and pestilence caused by the invasions of the Chola rulers of South India, which forced the Sangha to abandon the holy city of Anuradhapura, which had become a veritable citadel

of Buddhism, with Maha Vihara as the seat of ecclesiastical learning and piety, and retire into the forest solitude of the Kandyan hills. The holy Arahants endured great hardships only to preserve the treasure of the Dhamma, of which they were the heirs. Here, in a remote rock cave called Alu Lena, five hundred Arahats gathered in a conference presided over by the Venerable Rakkhita Thera. The situation that prevailed in the country, these Theras thought, definitely indicated a future spiritual decline, and therefore, they decided to commit into writing the Sacred Canon and its commentaries which had been brought to Ceylon from India by Arahat Mahinda and his companions, and which until now had been preserved in the original form by a line of Arahat teachers who handed down the Canon by oral tradition to their pupils and pupils' pupils. King Vattagamini Abhaya, who was informed of this far-reaching decision, made the necessary arrangements. Thus, in 89-88 B.C. at Alu Lena near Matale, the Fourth Great Council was held in which the Sacred Tipitaka and its commentaries were recited by five hundred Arahats and then committed to writing on ola leaves under the direct supervision of the Chief Adigar (Recorder of the King). It is recorded that these scripts were checked by these holy Arahats over a hundred times before passing them as authentic documents of the original Canon and the Commentaries. This original version has been preserved up to our time with utmost fidelity and care by successive generations of kings and Sangha Nayaka Theras.

#### **Fifth and Sixth Sangayana**

In 1871, under the auspices of King Mindan of Burma, the Sacred Canon and the commentaries were inscribed on seven hundred and twenty-nine marble slabs after a similar recital for five months by two thousand and four hundred distinguished Theras of the country at Mandalay.

Recently, in 1956 in commemoration of the 2500th Buddha Jayanti, an International Maha Sangha of distinguished bhikkhus from the various Buddhist countries of Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Ceylon, Laos and also from other countries like China, Japan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, etc., conjointly held the Sixth Great Buddhist Council at Rangoon, aided by their respective governments. The Burmese Government played the major role in organizing this

Sangayana which has brought out a splendid recession of the Tipitaka, its commentaries (Atthakatha) and sub-commentaries (Tika).

### **Survey of Tipitaka**

Pali literature rises to three peaks of development viz.

- 1) the Canonical, contemporary with the Buddha
- 2) the Commentarial in 5th century A.C.
- 3) the Sub-commentarial (Tika) in 12th century A.C.

The Tipitaka consists of three Pitakas viz., Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. A break up of the Pitakas is as follows:

#### **I Vinaya Pitaka**

The Vinaya Pitaka consists of the following principal works:

- 1) Parajika
- 2) Pacittiya
- 3) Mahavagga
- 4) Culavagga
- 5) Parivara

#### **II Sutta Pitaka**

The Sutta Pitaka consists of five major Nikayas or divisions:

- 1) Digha Nikaya
- 2) Majjhima Nikaya
- 3) Samyutta Nikaya
- 4) Anguttara Nikaya
- 5) Khuddaka Nikaya

The last division (Khuddaka Nikaya) consists of 15 works; these are;

- 1) Khuddaka Patha
- 2) Dhammapada
- 3) Udana
- 4) Itivuttaka
- 5) Suttanipata
- 6) Vimanavatthu
- 7) Petavatthu
- 8) Theragatha
- 9) Therigatha
- 10) Jataka
- 11) Niddesa
- 12) Patisambhida Magga
- 13) Apadana
- 14) Buddhavamsa
- 15) Cariyapitaka.

#### **III Abhidhamma Pitaka**

The Abhidhamma Pitaka consists of seven works as follows:

- 1) Dhammasangani
- 2) Vibhanga
- 3) Dhatukatha
- 4) Puggala Pannatti
- 5) Kathavatthu
- 6) Yamaka
- 7) Patthana

## **Vinaya Pitaka**

Vinaya literally means guidance and contains the rules of monastic discipline. The five books of Vinaya Pitaka are arranged according to subject-matter into these three parts:-

1) Vibhanga-Parajika and Pacittiya; 2) Khandhaka-Mahavagga and Culavagga; 3) Parivara.

Vibhanga gives an elaborate explanation of all the rules laid by the Buddha for Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. These rules-227 for Bhikkhus and 311 for Bhikkhunis are contained in the 'Code Book' called PATIMOKKHA, meaning that which 'delivers' (mokka) one from blame or impurity (papa).

Briefly, the Rules of the Order fall into two categories; rules governing the spiritual life of the bhikkhu or bhikkhuni, and rules governing the affairs of the Order. The Bhikkhu-rules are again twofold-those that have a spiritual basis, i, e., which lead to his spiritual edification and those that have a conventional basis, i, e., good manners, behaviour and customs which help maintain in a good human relationship. The rules of the Order are based on the finest of democratic principles. Nothing is done or owned individually; it is the Sangha which owns or promulgates a given code of conduct. In the matter of jurisprudence unless an offense is accepted by the accused or is proved beyond doubt, the accused has absolute protection of the Sangha. As a historical document Vinaya is a mine of varied information on contemporary social, political and economic systems, on commerce, taxation, law, agriculture, medicine, educational institutions, sects and so forth.

## **Decentralized Sangha**

The Buddhist Sangha, it is to be noted, is a completely decentralized body, a self-sufficient community, so formed as to provide the right environment for spiritual development. Its rules are so framed as to relieve the bhikkhu of all encumbrances, both subjective and objective. The various so-called sects among Buddhists are decidedly the product of this spirit of decentralization which holds aloft the charter of individual liberty. After all the very purpose of bhikkhu-life is to gain Liberation which can be

achieved only in an atmosphere of freedom. Hence the Vinaya rules, instead of tying the Bhikkhu down to any rigid pattern, provides him with maximum inner freedom, since these are entirely self-imposed. And the sects are, therefore, wholly organizational and never doctrinal since there is no difference of view among them as far as the basic Teachings of the Buddha are concerned.

### **Sutta Pitaka**

The Sutta Pitaka is the mainspring of Buddhist thought, being the repository of the original Discourses of the Buddha. It is divided into five main divisions called Nikayas which are collated according to the particular size, style, and particular arrangement of the suttas. These are: 1. DIGHA NIKAYA : The collection of long discourses;

2. MAJJHIMA NIKAYA : The collection of medium-length discourses;
3. SAMYUTTA NIKAYA : The collection of discourses arranged subjectwise;
4. ANGUTTARA NIKAYA : The collection of discourses numerically arranged;

5. KHUDDAKA NIKAYA : Miscellaneous collection in therefrom of separate works. Here the entire Buddhist view of life has been discussed in an objective and dignified way. The famous orientalist Dr. Rhys Davids says that the suttas are distinguished in the depth of philosophy, in the method of Socratic questioning often adopted, in the earnest and elevated tone of the whole, in the evidence they afford of the most out-turned thought of the day. The Sutta Pitaka also contains some discourses of some of Buddha's principal disciples such as Venerable Sariputta, Moggallana, Kaccana, and others.

A sutta literally means 'thread', so called since it leads one to a larger content of meaning not expressed in so many words. Thus every sutta has two contents - the Vohara or conventional content and the paramattha or the ultimate content, which makes the suttas the accessible to people of all levels, i.e., from the ordinary folk to the most learned scholars. Another characteristic feature of the suttas is that they are liberally sprinkled with simple,

yet telling, illustrations and homely stories. To drive home a profound truth, the Master uses for the simple, rural folks familiar similies such as of the bullock cart, seed, agricultural operations, or the irrigation ditch and so on; likewise, to tame an arrogant scholar, like the brahmin Bharadwaja, he may use a telling analogy illustrated by personal conduct. Bharadwaja, a learned scholar in the Vedas, scoffed at the idea of Gotama, a khattiya, becoming a religious teacher, which, according to him, was the prerogative of the brahmin, however vile he may be. He was further roused by some of Buddha's unorthodox teachings and his wrath broke all barriers when his wife became an ardent devotee of the Master.

Once, when the Buddha was preaching, he tore through the large crowd and, facing the Master, started hurling the filthiest of abuses at him until he was tired. In His unbounded compassion, the Buddha gently put to him a question, saying, 'Suppose, brahmin, a friend or relative were to visit your house and you were to offer him a plateful of sweets and he were to refuse it. To whom would that plateful of sweets return?' Of course, it is mine; it comes back to me,' he replied rudely. 'Likewise, good brahmin, I refuse to accept all that you said.' The moral went right into his heart and illumined his whole being like a flash of lightening piercing and illumining the dark sky. As the insight dawned on him that his actions recoiled on him with greater force, and having failed to affect one who refused to be offended, he fell at the feet of the Buddha and asked to be admitted to the Order.' No learned philosophical disquisition could have wrought in Bharadwaja so profoundly a change as this simple illustration did.

Futher, the Sutta Pitaka is also an excellent document on the contemporary cultural history of India. One finds graphic accounts of various conditions-social, religious, political etc., of the time. King Ajatasattu bluntly asked the Buddha as to what tangible benefit one could gain through the religious life as one could from one's occupation, and he enumerated a great many of the existing occupations. When the Buddha convinced him of the benefits of a truly spiritual life, this blood thirsty despot became an ardent devotee of the Master.

As to the form, the sutta begins with a historical account of how, where and under what conditions a discourse was given.



Then follows the main body of the sutta which ends with an expression of appreciation from the audience.

### **Abhidhamma Pitaka**

While the Sutta Pitaka treats the Dhamma in conventional (*voharavyavaharika*) terms, the Abhidhamma Pitaka treats it entirely in terms of ultimate reality (*Paramattha sacca*). It resolves all phenomena into their ultimate contents (*paramattha sarupa*) analytically and then aims at synthesis by finding the relations (*paccyaya*) between the various concomitant factors. The language of the Abhidhamma is purely scientific i.e., objective and impersonal, and contains no such words as 'I', 'We', 'He', 'She', 'Man', 'Tree', 'Cow', 'Mountain', 'God', etc., which are just conventional names given to an object. Here everything is expressed in terms of *Khanda* - 5 groups or aggregates of existence, *Ayatana* - 5 sensory organs and mind and their respective objects, *Dhatu*-elements, *Indriya*-faculties, *Sacca*-the fundamental truths, and so on. All relative concepts such as man, tree, etc., are reduced to their ultimate content, such as *Khanda*, *Ayatana* etc., and viewed as an impersonal psycho-physical process which is *ANICCA* (impermanent, changeful), *DUKKHA* (unsatisfactory, and *ANATTA* (without a permanent entity, e.g., ego or atma, i.e., insubstantial). The purpose of this analytical approach is to get rid of the egocentricity of selfhood which hinders evolution and which is the root-cause of bondage in Samsara-Phenomenal Existence.

### **Extra-canonical Literature**

The extra-canonical literature falls into three historical periods. The first period is from the compilations of the canon to the 5th century A.C.; the second from 5th century to 11th century, and the third from 12th century to modern times. The literature of the first period is known as the Classical Works of which only a few now survive, the rest being lost. The second period had been the most significant one in the development of non-canonical Pali literature; for, the commentaries of the Canon were written in this period. The third period has been even more prolific; for, apart from sub-commentaries (*tika*), many different classes of literature have come to be produced in this period.

### **Classical Works**

There are four books in this class, viz., *Nettipakarana*, *Petako-padesa*, *Milinda Panha* and *Sutta Sangaho*. The first two works, *Nettipakarana* (The Book of Guidance), and *petakopadesa* (Instruction on the Tipitaka), were composed by the Arahata Mahakacayana, a prominent, immediate disciple of the Buddha.

These are written in the style of the *Abhidhamma* and serve as good introductions of Buddha-dhamma. *Milinda Panha* (Questions of King Milinda), written in the style of the suttas, contains a dialogue between the Graeco-Bactrian King Menander (in Pali, *Milinda*) and the Thera Nagasena about most of the important points of Buddhism. *Sutta Sangho* is an anthology of suttas composed, probably, for the use of preachers.

A work on history entitled *Dipavamsa-Island Chronicles*, composed in Lanka, also belongs to this period. Contemporaneous too are some old commentarial works, such as *Mahatthakatha*, *Mahapaccari*, *Kurundi Atthakatha*, *Culapaccari*, *Andhakattakatha*, *Pannavara* and *Sankhepatthakatha*, which have been mentioned by Buddhaghosa in his Commentary, and which are now lost.

### **Commentaries**

The most important compositions of this periods are the works of Acharya Buddhaghosa who wrote extensive commentaries on almost all the books of the Tipitaka, except a few books of the *Khuddaka Nikaya*. He wrote commentaries on the *Patimokkha* and on the entire *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, and, of the *Sutta Pitaka*, the first four *Nikayas* and a few suttas of the fifth *Nikaya*. The chief contribution of the Acharya, however, was his monumental work, the *Visuddhi Magga*, the Path of Purification, which serves as an encyclopedia on the entire Buddha-vacana, very lucidly written in the style of the *Abhidhamma*. Acharya Buddhaghosa, an Indian Bhikkhu, wrote all of the large number of works in 5th century A C in Ceylon, where he had gone to study the Tipitaka and the old *Atthakathas*. Buddhaghosa is considered as the greatest Buddhist writer of all times.

Included in this class of literature are the contemporaneous works of Acharya Buddhadatta, who wrote a commentary on *Buddhav*

amsa and several other works of merit e.g., *Vinaya Vinicchaya* and *Uttara Vinicchaya*-compendiums of the *Vinaya* in verses, *Abhidhamma-vatara*-a handbook of Buddhist psychology, *Jinalankara*-an epic on Buddha's Great Victory. *Acariya Dhammapala*, another prolific writer, wrote commentaries on the remaining works of *Khuddaka*, *Therigatha* and *Cariyapitaka*, and also sub-commentaries on works such as the first four *Nikayas-Digha*, *Majjhima*, *Samyutta* and *Anguttara*, on *Nettipakarana*, *Visuddhi Magga* and several other works. All these *Acariyas* were Indians, of this period, a few notable ones being *Acariya Ananda*, author of *Abhidhamma Mulatika* and several *tikas* of *Buddhaghosa's* Commentaries of *Abhidhamma*. *Acariya Cula Dhammapala*, author of *Saccasankhepa*, etc.; *Acariya Upasena*, author of the famous manual of *Abhidhamma* called *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* and several other works. *Acariya Mahanama*, author of the commentary of *Patisambhida Magga*; and the *Acariyas Kassapa*, *Vajira-buddhi*, *Khema*, *Dhammasiri* and *Mahasami* to mention a few more, who wrote *Tikas* on various works.

There are also a few *Chronicles* and *grammatical works* belonging to this period, Such as, *Mahavamsa*, *Bodhivamsa*, *Anagata vamsa*, *Kaccayana*, *Vyakarana*, *Maha Niruttigandha* etc.

### **Sub-commentaries, etc.**

In the time of King *Parakramabahu* (12 A.C.) *Pali literature* received a great impetus in various fields. Under his auspices, the *Sinhala Thera Maha Kassapa* held a Council for the purpose of composing *Tikas* for all *atthakathas* and other ancillary literature to the Canon. He achieved, with the collaboration of a number of great scholar-monks like the Venerables *Sariputta*, *Sangharakkhita*, *Buddharakkhita*, *Sumangala* and *Saddhamma Jotipala* (of Burma), *Buddhanaga* and others, more than fifty voluminous sub-commentaries.

A 15th century stone-inscription of Burma at *Toungdwin* mentions the names of no less than 295 important works on various subjects which would show how prolific had been the growth of *Pali literature* in this period.

In subsequent centuries, right upto our time, in all the *Buddhist countries*, e.g., *Ceylon*, *Thailand*, *Laos* and *Burma*, there has been a living tradition of such efforts of literary production.

## **Buddhists and the Scriptures**

Though the scriptures are considered holy and venerated with devotion, they are not the end in Buddhism. Buddhist scriptures never force a person to adhere to the scriptures or to have belief in them without considering it properly. The Buddha always supported the freedom and progress of mankind. He emancipated man from the thralldom of religion. He also released man from the monopoly and the tyranny of the priestcraft and from the slavery to the scriptures. It was the Buddha who was the first person in the history of religions, advised man to exercise his reason and not to allow himself to be driven meekly like dumb cattle, following the dogma of religion. The Buddha stood for rationalism, democracy and practical, ethical conduct in religion. He introduced this religion for people to practice with human dignity.

The Buddha was for free enquiry. He advised his followers to test everything like a goldsmith who tests gold by heating, hitting and rubbing on touch stone. In the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha gave the following guidelines

Do not accept anything based upon mere reports,  
traditions or hearsay,

Nor upon the authority of religious scriptures,

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 Teacher.'

'But, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and bad: tending to harm yourself or others, reject them.

'And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good: conducive to the spiritual welfare of yourself as well as others, accept and follow them.'

The Buddha had upheld the highest degree of freedom not only in its human essence but also in its divine qualities. It is a freedom that does not deprive man of his dignity. It is a freedom that releases one from slavery to dogmas and dictatorial religious laws or religious punishments.

The Buddha emphasizes much on the practice of His teaching rather than an intellectual study. In the Dhammapada we come across two verses: "Much though he recites the sacred texts, but acts not accordingly, that heedless man is like a cowherd who only counts the cows of others—he does not partake of the blessings of a holy life." "Little though he recites the sacred texts, but puts the Teaching into practice, forsaking lust, hatred and delusion, with true wisdom and emancipated mind, clinging to nothing of this or any other world — he indeed partakes of the blessings of a holy life." Dhammapada 19, 20

### **Buddhists schools and the scriptures**

A few hundred years after the Buddha's passing away, there arose eighteen different schools or sects all of which claimed to represent the original Teachings of the Buddha. The differences between schools were basically due to various interpretations of the Teachings of the Buddha. Over a period of time, these schools gradually merged into two main schools: Theravada and mahayana. Today, a majority of the followers of Buddhism are divided into these two schools. In spite of some differences, however, it must be stressed that there is absolutely no disagreement concerning the Teaching of the Buddha contained in the sacred Tripitaka texts. The Tripitaka in Tibetan or Chinese or Japanese is not much different from the original Pali as most of the Pali discourses are found in those texts.

The basic teachings in all the texts are absolutely similar. They are:

1. Both accept Sakyamuni Buddha as the Teacher.

2. The Four Noble Truths are exactly the same in both schools.
3. The Eightfold Path is exactly the same in both schools.
4. The Paticca-samuppada or teaching on Dependent Origination is same in both schools.
5. Both reject the idea of a supreme being who created and governed this world.
6. Both accept Anicca-impermanence, Dukkha-suffering and Anatta-selflessness as the characteristics of life.
7. Both accept Sila-moral purification, Samadhi-mastery over mind and Panyawisdom as the path to liberation.

Buddhist scriptures does not prevent anyone from learning the teachings of other religions. In fact, the Buddha encouraged His followers to learn about other religions and to compare His Teachings with other teachings. The Buddha says that if there are reasonable and rational teachings in other religions, His followers are free to respect such teachings. He has also said that just as the footprints of all animals fit in the footprint of elephant, even so all 'kusaladhammas', the good teachings, fit into the Buddha's teachings of Four Noble Truths.

In conclusion it can be said that the Buddhist scriptures are the sources where one is exposed to the splendid Teachings of the Buddha. Buddhists take His Teachings as 'raft'. In the discourse on 'the Simile of Raft' the Buddha advised His followers to use the Teachings like raft. A raft is used by someone who wants to cross a stream or river. After crossing he does not carry the raft on his head but leave it on the shore for others to use. Similarly, the Buddha's Teachings are supreme aid to cross the ocean of suffering and reach Nibbana, the Ultimate Freedom.