

## Revolution!

Human history has seen at least four great revolutions that have effectively shaped how we live today. These four are the Glorious Revolution (1688), the French Revolution (1789), the Chinese Revolution (1911) and the Russian Revolution (1917). As a result of the Glorious Revolution (England), the theory of the divine right of kings (the ideology that the king's power comes from God and as such is not subject to the people's will) was abandoned. The American and the French revolutions further weakened the theory's appeal. The Russian Revolution destroyed the Tsar's autocracy and led to the formation of the Soviet Union. The Chinese Revolution marked the end of the imperial power and the birth of the Chinese Republic (1949).

All these revolutions were basically political. They involved shifts of power from one ruling group to another. They were all external events, united by the idea of popular liberation. These revolutions also significantly weakened another power that was closely connected with the country's ruling elites: Christianity. Having lost much of its political power base, Christianity today must employ other means of winning converts. However, its language of power and domination still openly hints at its political religiosity and using love to conquer all.

As Buddhists, we regard the Buddha's teachings (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) as constituting the most significant religious revolution in human history. Unlike the other revolutions, this is an internal one, directed at individual change and liberation, the early Buddhist teachings liberated us from the God-idea itself.

The Buddha, simply put, refuses to accept an idea where we can claim to put all the power in the universe into one name, and then we use that essentialist hammer to knock down whatever we fear or whomever differs from us. World wars and widespread violence occur because we fancy that we have the right to dominate and exploit others, "for God and our right."

The God-idea is a most dangerous weapon in the heads and hands of those who have little idea of what ideas can do. The greatest wonder of God is that he has really done nothing at all, and yet this universe and us exist. Nothing needs to be said of God, nothing *can* be said of anything we imagine to be bigger than everything else.

If we try, then we have politicized religion. For, we are talking about the power, wittingly or unwittingly, to dominate others. We have been dominating nature, and the costs are rising even now all over the not-so-good earth.

We are working on the wrong nature. We are working on external nature, when the real work is with the nature within. No revolution out there can bring meaningful, even lasting, progress, wealth, happiness or peace. All this can only truly come from within: it must be a mental revolution. As it has to do with the mind, we must do it ourselves. No one else can or must do this for us.

The revolution of our own mind is the most significant of all revolutions. Without a free mind, we will always be enslaved by our own ideas and those who seem to share the same ideas. These same ideas are those rooted in greed, hate, delusion and fear. These are the strongest chains of all, because it is very difficult for us to see them, because we would rather not see them: this is called "belief."

The chains of greed enslave us to the idea that we never have enough, and to keep on wanting. It cheats us into believing in *having* rather than in *being*. We might *have* things, but to *be* really happy in another thing. As such, we are in reality always poor no matter how much we have!

The chains of hate enslave us to tribes of narrow beliefs that seek and punish differences. They demand sameness in views and actions, taking these as the strength of the tribe so that it prevails above all others. Hate alienates humans by race, religion, class, sex, wealth and the measuring of others in terms of our own biases.

The chains of delusion enslave us with ideas that insidiously remove our confidence in self-worth, self-reliance, self-empowerment, and self-liberation. So we run to power-figures, father-figures and religious figures for approval. Our existence become dependent on others. Since this is a one-way dependence, there is no interbeing. Delusion tricks us into thinking that our *internal* problems (ignorance, craving and suffering) can be solved by *external* means.

Delusion tricks us into worshipping Buddhas in our own images instead of living the Dharma, the path to true reality. It deludes us into thinking that the noise of prayers are more efficacious than stilling our own hearts, whence all our problems arise. We simply need to stop for a while and see the truth of impermanence within us and all around.

The chains of fear grip us with a sense of guilt at the idea that we are weak and never good enough to work our own salvation. We are so belittled by delusion and fear that we project respect and power onto appearances. We mistake looks for reality, without examining the reality that this veneer hides. We religiously presume that clothes make the man, that robes makes the monk, without carefully studying the wearer's moral virtue and wisdom.

The God-idea is about crowds and crowd-control. It is the holding centre of political crowds and religious gatherings. This centre is the image of a power perceived as bigger than us. True happiness, on the other hand, is about spaciousness, just as heaven is a happy space; just as we need space for growth. But for growth to thrive, there must also be stimulation, and active responses to such stimulations. This is called suffering, the beginning of wise faith.

This taste of suffering is not about pain, but a vision that there is something vital missing from our lives. The missing pieces are not found outside of us, nor in beliefs (that we can find answers without ever trying). Indeed, when we think in terms of pieces, we would feel that bits are missing. We must stop thinking for a while, so that we can feel: see life right in the eye of the moment. And there, we see only one enduring reality: *change*. This is the vision that begins our inner revolution.

The internal revolution begins with our constantly reflecting that health is the greatest of profits, especially mental health (it is immeasurable); that contentment is the greatest wealth: how little or how much we have depends on how we think or measure; we may have things, but we can never own them; that those who are honest to us are our truest friends, closer than relatives; and that the highest peace is a mind free from greed, hate, delusion and fear.

Piya Tan ©2011a 101118