

Boundless love

In one of my public meditation classes, a new student who did lovingkindness for the first time, was deeply moved by the powerful bliss that welled up and brightened in him. During feedback time, he asked if, during the lovingkindness meditation, he could visualize some divine figure or holy image he was familiar with.

A thought flashed across my mind, as I recalled how the Buddha, in his profound wisdom and boundless compassion, has answered just this kind of question two and a half millennia ago, and whose teachings are still with us today. Indeed, the very fact that this young man was able to immerse himself in such profound and spacious joy is because this teaching is still preserved for our benefit in the suttas and by the monastic contemplatives who have diligently and humbly practised the Buddha word and way “as is.”

Here is my answer to that happy young meditator by way of a reflection, so you, too, can benefit from our joyful taste of inner bliss. I told him that if we believe in some kind of holy being of great love and compassion – whether it is God or Buddha – we can, if we are inclined to, begin there. However, most importantly, we should not stop there. If we do, then it is not lovingkindness or “boundless” love. It is only a one-way adoration or worship of our image of an almighty agency: bluntly put, the worship of power.

If we are familiar with a loving image of a divine figure, we can begin our lovingkindness there, but we must move on to universalize that love. This method of practice is not, strictly speaking, a cultivation of lovingkindness, but what the Buddha calls “recollection of deities” (*devatā’nussati*). Even during the Buddha’s time, there were those who believed in some kind of “higher power” called Brahma (what we today call God).

In the suttas, the Buddha constantly reminds us that any supreme being (if he exists) must have boundless love, boundless compassion, boundless gladness, and boundless equanimity. A God of power or vengeance is clearly unhelpful in our cultivation of lovingkindness. A God of compassion will love us even when we do not deserve it. A good God will show gladness, rejoice when we show goodness. But the world, being capricious as it is, is never consistent in its ways. A good God would equanimously look on with kindly eyes, knowing that good will prevail, and that good is always naturally better than bad.

Dharma-spirited Buddhists are familiar with such teachings. The Buddha teaches that better than the worship of an external agency of power and glory, is for us to cultivate Godliness within ourselves. The Buddha often faces great opposition to his teaching of unconditional love. There are the unscrupulous brahmins or priests who see themselves as “owning” God (like the numerous well-organized God-centred churches and groups today), so that we can only speak to God, or be blessed or rewarded by him through these priests and pastors. They perform elaborate rituals and mutter strange chants for the benefit of their tribe – for appropriate fees and offerings, of course.

The Buddha gently but firmly puts his foot down, and said *no* to such priestcraft and pastorcraft. We can have and enjoy Godly blessings directly, without any priests or pastors who themselves lack love and goodness. The Buddha teaches us to cultivate Godliness within us. This is the truly supreme worship: to feel love, show compassion, radiate gladness, and hold equanimity.

If we were to only worship God – “our” God – then this view differentiates us from the worshippers and believers of “other” Gods. Then, we fall into the rut of divisive and tribal rants: either you are with us or against us! However, in the cultivation of lovingkindness, we gradually break down the barriers of “I,” “you” and “they,” and progressively feel and enjoy a boundless love to all beings and our environment.

There is no greater joy on earth or in heaven than this boundless love. Just imagine an earth or a heaven without love. There is neither heaven nor earth if there is no boundless love.

God-belief and domination (both psychological and political) have always gone hand in hand throughout human history. Notice how people who speak of a God almighty, invariably use this idea to dominate others, and destroy their “enemies,” even whole nations of people.¹

Organized religions tend to see God as someone demanding, or rather needing, our worship and adoration. This is like an image of a pompous colonial patriarch who had conquered and ruled our lands and peoples.² Now the colonizers are gone – many of them have even abandoned such a religion – but their God still haunts many of us. We still follow their God-centred religions, and messing ourselves terribly.³ It is as if we have been taught to walk backwards in a prison, and now that we are free, we still do not know how to walk the normal way!

Religions dominate; spirituality liberates. A religion works to attract crowds, funds and resources, and build walls to hold the flock. We are like sheep to be herded, or fishes to be fished – harvests for tribal priests and pastors who have usurped God’s place.

Through our cultivation of unconditional love, we liberate God from being a captive of the priests and pastors. Godliness will then naturally and freely find its way into our hearts, and into every human heart. When we cultivate lovingkindness, we open our hearts, which then open our eyes, so that we wake up to the true reality of who we really are.

We are not sheep or fishes or harvests, but legitimate heirs to the true and bountiful wealth called Dharma (“self-liberating truth”). We have been drugged with a powerful dose of dogma by religious peddlers and turned into the living dead, into zombies, who see religion merely as holy books and sacred walls, as rules and rituals, as a system of rewards and punishments.

The Buddha reminds us that we are heirs of the highest truth,⁴ that we are really free if we love ourselves as we love others, show that love to those who will benefit from it (even when they don’t deserve it), to rejoice in the goodness of others, and to remain calm and clear-minded, and wisely unmoved in the worldly winds of gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, joy and pain.⁵

Then, our body and mind have become the true temple of God, right here on earth, right now while we live – not as some after-death or heavenly benefits.⁶ This is not about loyalty benefits or religious rewards.⁷ It is simply knowing and accepting that we are each capable of Godliness, of building our heaven here and now. To do this, we only need to cultivate love, compassion, gladness, and equanimity that characterize God in high heaven – by expressing these wholesome emotions in our own being to ourselves and our fellow beings.

¹ Many South American civilizations, such as those of the Incas and the Mayas, were exterminated by the Spanish conquistadores with their horses, superior gun-power, and diseases, with the blessing and for the benefit of the Roman Church. See Piyasilo, “[Say no to the evangelists](#),” Singapore, 3rd ed, 2005.

² Malaysia and Singapore were under British imperial rule in the 19th-20th centuries.

³ See Reflection, “[Moneytheism](#),” R424, 2015.

⁴ See [Dhamma Dāyāda Sutta](#) (M 3), SD 2.18.

⁵ See [Loka,dhamma Sutta 2](#) (A 8.6), SD 42.3.

⁶ See Reflection, “[God's temple is within us](#),” R26, 2008.

⁷ Notice how in most religions today, their preachers do not threaten others with “hell” – because people now know better how religious ideas are all human inventions, after all. But heavenly or Godly rewards based on our greed, lust, hate and fear work better when we still have these negative emotions. See Reflection, “[Religion as illusion](#),” R407, 2015.

Even if we do not believe in any God, we are still capable of love, compassion, gladness, and equanimity – maybe, even more easily so, because we are free of religious views and restrictions. We can now see the whole mountain and have no quarrel about having only one view of it.

Religion is not always about love, compassion, gladness, and equanimity – religion today is a local enterprise or global business concerned mainly with the tribe, with power, with wealth. However, if we are loving, compassionate, joyfully appreciative of others, and wisely equanimous, then we are better than being religious – we are truly good people: we are spiritual, those who understand and accept the true spirit of life and its blessings.

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