

Statement, status, state

[Previously published as fb190727 piya]

At the root of **religion** is, as a rule, nothing more than a set of statements. But, it depends on who made or makes these statements. The religious **statement** is invariably authenticated or validated when it is shown or believed to have been “stated” by some power or authority in the past, and such statements, it seems, are verified by more statements called the Scriptures.

Statement

However, **scriptures** are simply dead words and dry bones to which life and light are given by the elite or ideologues, those with some **status**, like a leader, teacher or someone with power or given it (charisma). The **state** of things, however, can, and often is, something else altogether. The real state of things, simply put, is our personal experiences, and these often have nothing to do with those statements or status. There are our own **state** of being, our personal experiences.

The truth and goodness of a religion depends very much on whether its **statements** are from its Scriptures or from the those with **status**. In the God-religions, the real **state** of affairs, that is, our personal experiences do not really count. What we are and what happens to us, it seems, are decided, defined or understood in the light of the religious statements, and should be acceptable, at least not contradictory, to those with status; so it seems.

In Buddhism, too, we have a set of **statements**, the oldest of which are preserved in the suttas (without any initial capital). However, we also have statements are later invented by those with **status** (power, charisma or for any reason, not necessarily right or good), and they are held up as “truer” than the suttas: their authors called them Sutras (with the initial capital and a Sanskrit form to give it Class, that is, status).

Status

In many ways, it can be inconvenient for most Buddhists to follow the **statements** of the suttas. Then, we have to study and, more importantly, understand, these suttas. This takes time, which we may lack or cannot afford, since we have other priorities or are too busy with the world.

Or worse, we think that what we already know is sufficient, even final. We have become an authority or power over others because of our **status**, which may refer to the respect, admiration, even love, that we attract from others (for whatever reasons).

When our **status** alone justifies our **statements**, regardless of what the suttas state, then, it is very likely that we are a **Guru**. This refers to someone who is, or sees himself as, the final authority, especially in a religion. It is not that **what** he says that is the truth, but rather **because** he says so, it is taken as the truth.

In other words, the Guru is a Teacher who is revered as being above the teaching and everyone else. This was the way of the Brahmins in the Buddha's time. But this is practically true of most Buddhist teachers even today: they each act as if they are the final authority in Buddhism without ever consulting or respecting the suttas.

We need to work to gain the **state** of peace and wisdom that the Buddha has himself reached; at least, to diligently and habitually search the suttas. We should definitely not degrade them. Otherwise, we can only make **statements** pretending to have such peace and wisdom. What are we then?

It helps to remember: *the statement is not the state.*

State

However, when we carefully study the suttas, that is, the records of the early teachings of the historical Buddha, we will notice that they mostly refer to **states** of truth and beauty. They teach us about the state of affairs in ancient India; the true state of human behavior; the real state of human nature and life itself; and the state of the world we live in. These states help us to see **true reality**.

State as used here has 2 important senses.

(1) State refers to conditions and conditionality. We and the world around us and beyond are all but conditions, an infinite network of causes and effects that work in cyclic and circular ways, with neither beginning nor end. It is this conditionality that we need to observe and understand if we are to break free from them.

(2) The second meaning of state is our own nature: what we are, how we experience things, how we understand them, and what this does to us. This is what the Buddha teaches us: to live is to learn, to learn is to change, to change is to be liberated from ignorance.

The 4 signs

Both these senses of **state** reflect the true nature of life, true reality. The Bodhisattva (the Buddha-to-be) saw this true nature of life in the first 3 of the 4 signs: **decay, disease and death**. The 4th sign is that of **renunciation**, of unconditionally embracing these truths by letting go of them. Only by doing so, we are fully freed from them.

All these truths can be subsumed, summarized, under one word: **impermanence**. This means all things change. This means that as long as we live, we simply are. What we were is dead and gone; there is really *no will be*.

When we do not understand impermanence, we let the past freeze our present life; we let the future skew what is real and now. Hence, our life is neither here nor there. We have no ground to stand on; we are never really happy.

Whatever can be done that will better us as a person, can and must be done now. There is no other time.

Etymology

All these 3 words—statement, status and state—derive from the Latin root **sta**, a variant stem of “stāre,” to stand. The word “status” comes from **sta** + tus, which signifies a past participle, giving it the meaning, “(it) had stood.”

This is reflected in **Statement** and **status**, too. However, in general usage, this root gives each of these words a sense of “condition” or “conditionality.” This is the essence of **state** in the spiritual sense, too.

Change

This means that there is neither a First Cause nor a Prime Mover; only conditions, causes and effects; change, impermanence occurring all the time.

For time is change; *change is the meaning of life*. When we know its meaning, we also know the **purpose of life**: to change. It's as simple as that. Religion only makes it complicated for the benefit of those with Statements and Status!

Spirituality simplifies our life back to the true nature of things. Like the Buddha sitting joyfully under the Bodhi tree.

R638 Inspiration 390
Piya Tan ©2020