

## Real Buddhists are countless

While statistics might be helpful for political strategy and planning, or for some triumphalist religious claims, it is well known that numbers do not always reflect reality, especially when we are speaking of moral character and mental states. One of the difficulties is with how we define “religion” or “Buddhism.” For spiritual purposes, it is beneficial for us to define Buddhism as an ideal way of working for personal happiness, emotional resilience, and unconditional love.

Personal happiness means a feeling of inner peace despite the troubles and unhappiness around us. This true happiness arises from the understanding that the truth is not “out there,” but in here, in our hearts. We define, or can define, what makes us happy (without harming others and nature).

Emotional resilience is the ability to face an issue or problem in a wisely present manner, that is, we are effectively a part of the immediate solution or possible resolution. It is the courage to face up to various challenges to what we hold dear in life, especially our loved ones, livelihood, values and faith. Ideally, a common vision inspires and guides all these.

To be emotionally resilient means that we are ever mindful of what we truly treasure in our lives, and the happiness that comes from this. Simply, this means we make every effort to remember beautiful places, happy events, and the goodness of others, and our own capacity for making wise choices. Above all, we know that change is the only certainty, and that time is a good teacher and healer. But we must be a good student, too.

One of the greatest setbacks of a religion is when it cannot really show unconditional love. The God-religions, for example, will only accept you if you believe in “God.” It is impossible to make a right choice of God, when even within the same religion, not everyone believes in how he is defined or undefined. Of course, we can turn to the sweeping notion that God is one and the same. But this is only another kind of God.

The final question is inevitably, “Whose God do you believe in?” True spiritual freedom begins when we realize that we can abstain from God-voting, and so we abstain.

We can safely say that the only religion that actually teaches in true detail what unconditional love is, and how to practise it, is Buddhism, or more specifically, early Buddhism, that is, the Buddha’s teachings before sectarianism arose. Anyone from any religion, or with no religion, or uncertain about it, will have no problem with the five Buddhist precepts that teach the value of life, happiness, freedom, truth and mental liberation.

If we speak in realistic terms (not theologically, mythically, symbolically, etc), we must say that LIFE is the most precious thing we have: indeed, we *are* life itself. As we treasure our life, so do others. We all seek some way of sustaining our life. We feel HAPPY when we are able to earn a living, to support ourselves, and to be an independent individual. We are even more happy if we have real FREEDOM.

Society, however, can only be possible when each of us is willing to sacrifice some of our freedom (such as in obeying the law and respecting others). In other words, freedom here does not mean licence or anarchy, which is likely to deprive us of freedom and other life-affirming values. Yet we can still enjoy a high degree of personal freedom, especially by keeping ourselves physically and mentally healthy. This is where Buddhism can teach us some things which no other religion or system can.

Early Buddhism can teach us (meaning anyone willing to learn) to be unconditionally free. What really imprison us are our thoughts, beliefs and gullibility. If we can free ourselves from thoughts for a while on a regular basis (even say 5-10 minutes a day), we will be able to break out of our self-imposed prison of negative emotions, views, and ignorance. As I have said before, this is the greatest prayer: a prayer without word.<sup>1</sup>

In our clear still minds, we will truly see that we are capable of such boundless bliss, that we have no need of religious ideas, philosophizing or mental verbosity. Yet we become truly religious in the spirit. We have learned to truly feel; we are truly in touch with ourselves. When we emerge from this cultivation of unconditional self-acceptance, we are truly free with what good we want to do with our lives, and to blissfully and meaningfully touch the lives of others.

The number of people who see this in Buddhism are growing as fast as there are those who realize they can and want to sort things out for themselves. This is a great way of self-empowerment and unconditional love. Such “Buddhists” are uncountable and cut across all religions and professions. They are not statistics; they are states of fully being.

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<sup>1</sup> See Prayer Without Words: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/29-Prayer-without-words-101215.pdf>