

To be Buddhist is to see beyond Buddhism

A religion, if we look deep enough into it, is a narrative of the struggles of a tribe for self-preservation. These religious narrators had (and have) the imagination and expression of whom we today call science fiction writers and group leaders. The big difference is that the religious spinners actually believe or want others to believe their fiction to be fact, and to live by that.

Even today we have new religions, albeit on a more global scale. In the 2001 census, for example, 390,127 people in England and Wales stated that their religion was “Jedi,” the knights of the Star Wars science fiction series. Effectively, it was the fourth largest religion there (0.8%), surpassing even Sikhism, Judaism and Buddhism. Similar “Jedi census phenomenon” is found in many other English-speaking countries.¹

What can we learn from all this? That we are drawn to what we see as sources of power? Especially the power of good against evil? Or, are we simply romantics who idolize a good narrative? It is possible that it is our innate desire for good and growth that draws us to such narratives.

Simply put we sense a source of joy in them, and wish to be lost in them: it is like falling in love, but with an idea, a vision. If such a vision helps us to move on into ever clearer self-discovery and human liberation, surely it must be worthwhile. In other words, such narratives inspires a wholesome change in us.

The slough of religion must be shed as we mature in our understanding of religiosity. If not, we would remain as a self-devouring uroboros, a snake eating its own tail. Only when the caterpillar breaks out of its cocoon, can it freely fly and pollinate the flowers so that they may fruit.

Religion, especially organized and world religions and their local manifestations, have become almost nothing more than means of dominating (even destroying) others, an oligarchy of the powerful and the priestly over the minds of the many. Religion has become crowd-control and sheep-herding, a crowded noisiness, rather than a loving way teaching us to rise above the crowd and noise to become true individuals.

Religion today is a multinational corporation run by an individual or a group, to systematically exploit us in every way, sucking away valuable and limited resources of followers and the unwary, with empty promises of this-life material euphoria and immediate blessings, or as after-life dividends. Religious leaders promise to liberate “all beings” when they have not even been freed from their mutual hatred and distrust. Their bush of global prayer is mostly a disguised desire for world domination.

Why not simply tell others the simple good news that we can all, every one of us, save ourselves, if we want to. Indeed, the real blessings and succour that we, if we are truly religious, enjoy are, in fact, our own latent goodness, that lie dormant in our hearts, even before we found religion. If so, then, religion can be hazardous to our already good health.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jedi_census_phenomenon#cite_note-nationalstatistics-9.

We rarely choose a religion on account of its trueness. For, if this were so, once we have found it, we do not need it any more! The reality is that we are more likely to seek a religion, or an aspect of religiosity, that agrees with our pet ideas and wants. If we are small-hearted or big-headed, we tend to look for endorsement from a teacher or a teaching. If we are big-hearted or open-minded, we tend to see the goodness of a teacher or a teaching in our own image.

Indeed, many of us have lost the power of listening and feeling. The moment we hear something that seems worthwhile, we fail to reflect deep enough how our lives could be richer or freer on account of it. Or, if we perceive a critical feedback, we see it as a dagger before us, held to our ego-balloon. So we constantly lie in a bed of daggers.

A true religion is one that helps us to understand how we view the world, and how our senses create our worlds. Yet we neither directly nor truly experience the world of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches. We look at the present moment but see only ghosts of the past.

So we judge the present, whether a person or a thing, in terms of what we tasted in the past as being pleasant, as painful or as neutral. If we perceive a present person or event as reminding us of a past pleasurable experience, we would like it (again). If we assume an event before us as invoking an unpleasant or painful memory, we would see pain in the present (again). And if we fail to link the here and now to something from our past, we tend to simply ignore it, and so reinforce and perpetuate our ignorance.

Those who sense such habits of the heart, are likely, in their devious moments, to invoke such ideas in us, too, and so manipulate us like a shrewd peddler his customer, or a wily conman his victim. Our greed, hate, delusion or fear are lightning rods in such a merciless storm. If we fail to see the karmic nature of actions and consequences, then whatever is good in us could be misdirected and exploited by others.

The Buddha teaches us firstly to notice how noisy our minds are, and how cluttered our hearts have become. The noise and clutter are our own reactivity to those of others when we are unwilling or unable to feel what others are saying or doing. To “feel” here means to see beyond our immediate perceptions, and to learn from what is unspoken and silent. To feel is to see the whole picture, and become a healing or joyful part of it.

Buddhism, as taught by the Buddha, is a reminder that there are moments when we need to forget ourselves, to let go even of our Buddhisms, to see beyond religion itself, before we can truly see ourselves. When we have even a glimpse of our true self, it is easier then for us to see the minds and hearts of others. People can be full of precious surprises, and it is always a joy to be surprised by their goodness and joy. To allow joyful surprises into our lives, we must first remove what prevents us from being surprised in the first place. This, you must uncover for yourself. You must yourself rise beyond and free yourself from this. Surprise yourself.

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