

SD 62.6b**Religious Pluralism and Dual Belonging**

An exploration into living both Buddhism and Christianity

by Piya Tan ©2024

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1 Religious pluralism

1.1 THE BUDDHA AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

1.1.1 The Buddha ministers to non-Buddhists

1.1.1.1 The (Bojjhaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta (S 46.52)¹ relates that heterodox wanderers located near the Jetavana monastery are teaching the 5 hindrances and the 7 awakening factors, 2 of the key practical teachings of the Buddha. When told of this, the Buddha asks whether they are familiar with the “twofold” aspects of these teachings, namely, how they are each applied in terms of oneself and in terms of others? The Buddha then explains these to the monks, stating that only the Buddha or his disciple or “one who has heard from them ... could satisfy the mind with an answer.” [§12]

The Buddha’s statement may be understood in this way (as noted by Gethin): “The wanderers of other schools may abandon the five nivaranas and develop the seven bojjhaṅgas, but the full potential inherent in this practice is not understood or fulfilled by them.”² They may benefit in some way from these teachings, but will not be able to attain the path as streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats; as the Buddha states in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta**, “Empty of recluses are the outside doctrines.” (D 16,5.27).³

1.1.1.2 While we can read the Buddha’s statement [1.1.1.1] as declaring the uniqueness, even superiority, of his teachings in regards to **awakening**, what the Buddha does not say is also significant. He seems to accept that there are common teachings and practices amongst his community and the followers of “other sects,” that is, other faiths.

At least on a doctrinal level, we may thus conclude that such overlapping of doctrines and practices amongst the early Buddhists and the contemporary wanderers suggests that there is some kind of **religious pluralism**. In fact, we have numerous cases of brahmins who were also drawn to the Buddha’s teachings who, after listening to the Buddha, “go for refuge” in the 3 jewels.

The best known of such refuge-goers was the eminent brahmin **Jāṇussoṇī**, who went for refuge at least a dozen times, as recorded in the suttas.⁴ Despite his numerous occasions of refuge-going, Jāṇussoṇī, was never mentioned in the suttas as having attained the path, that is, at least as a streamwinner.

1.1.1.3 Then, there is the case of another brahmin **Dhānañjāni** of Tandula, pālā, dvāra in Rājagaha, as recorded in **the Dhānañjāni Sutta** (M 97). The Sutta records that Sāriputta visits the brahmin on his deathbed and gives him terminal counselling by way of the divine abodes, with which brahmins are familiar, and Dhānañjāni is reborn in the brahma world. When the Buddha questions Sāriputta why he did not teach the dying brahmin “while there was more to be done” (meaning guiding him to attain the path), Sāriputta replies that “These brahmins are devoted to the brahma-world.” This is a remarkable case where an arhat monk does not convert a dying brahmin but respects his faith!

The Buddha confirms that Dhānañjāni “has died and has reappeared in the brahma-world.”⁵ Although this seems like a gentle reproach from the Buddha to Sāriputta, Sāriputta must have noticed that Dhānañjāni is not capable of reaching the path at that time. In fact, **the (Brahma,vihāra) Subha Sutta** (M

¹ SD 62.6a.

² SD 62.6a (1.2.1.2).

³ S 16,5.27/2:151), SD 9; SD 49.14 (3.1.1).

⁴ See SD 44.3 (2.4).

⁵ M 97,38/2:196 (SD 4.9).

99) records the Buddha himself teaching rebirth in the brahma-world when the listener lacks the readiness for the path.⁶

1.1.1.4 Then there is the case of the wealthy part-time matted hair ascetic,⁷ **Keṇiya** of Āpana,⁸ protector of 5,000 families, who wore the yellow robe by day and indulged in worldly pleasures at night.⁹ When the Buddha and 1,250 monks visited Āpana, Keṇiya treats them very well. In his householder role (in the evening), Keṇiya offers the monks beverages (fruit drinks).¹⁰ Then he invites them for a meal the following morning.

At the end of the meal, the Buddha gave his *anumodanā* (joyful appreciation) to Keṇiya and the gathering with these beautiful thanksgiving verses:

A burnt offering is the glory of sacrifices.	The Sāvitrī is the best of poetic metres.
Amongst humans the king is the foremost.	The sea is the face of rivers.
The moon is the face of the stars;	the sun is foremost of those that shine.
For those who desiring merit,	the sangha is truly glory for the sacrificer.

(M 92,26 = V 1:246 = Sn 568 f)¹¹

Note that in these two verses, only the very last line refers to an actual Buddhist teaching. The first 2 lines refer to the Vedic or brahminical tradition; and the lines in between are common allusions. We see here the Buddha speaking the language of the audience. Keṇiya however remains unconverted.

1.1.1.5 In the preceding subsections, we have seen a significant number of non-Buddhists—brahmins, wanderers, householders and others—who were impressed or inspired by the Buddha or his teachings, many of whom even went for refuge but did not attain the path (none of them attained even streamwinning). It is likely that such individuals kept to their old religions but also practised the Buddha's teaching or were sympathetic to it.¹²

1.1.1.6 In post-Buddha times, with the rise of sectarianism and teacher-centred schools, we see what may be called "**Buddhist pluralism**," that is, we see non-Theravāda monastics residing in Theravāda monasteries. Or within the same monastery, we may have residents holding different views about the teaching—such as contemplative monks and scholar monks—living together with respect, or at least tolerance for one another.

⁶ M 99,24-27/2:207 f (SD 38.6).

⁷ A matted hair ascetic (*jaṭṭila*) is so called because he keeps his hair braided together in a pile on his head (*jaṭṭā*). There is no one set of beliefs held by all matted hair ascetics, but some (like the 3 Kassapa brothers) practise fire-worship (S 35.28, SD 1.3).

⁸ Āpana was in Aṅguttarāpa, located north of the river Mahī, about 580 km (360 mi) long, the 2nd largest river in Rajasthan (W India): SD 50.20 (2.2).

⁹ Comy says that Keṇiya became an ascetic to safeguard his wealth (from being taxed, etc) (SnA 2:440).

¹⁰ **Keṇiya Vatthu** (Mv 6.35 @ V 1:245 f). For the list of allowable juices: Mv 6.35.6 (SD 45.7b).

¹¹ For a literal tr, see **Keṇiya Vatthu** §8 (SD 45.7b). See SD 61.4 (4.1.2.4).

¹² Such cases incl the class-conscious brahmin Soṇadaṇḍa of **Soṇadaṇḍa S** (D 4/1:111-126), SD 30.5; the headman Yodhājīva of (**Gāmaṇi**) **Yodh'ājīva S** (S 42.3/4:308 f), SD 23.3; the headman Bhadraka of **Bhadraka S** (S 42.11/4:327-330), SD 55.7; prince Bodhi of **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85/2:91-97), SD 55.2.

In our own times, with the rise of secularism¹³ and modernism,¹⁴ we may see Buddhist monastics of differing traditions (that is, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, etc) living together within the same monastery, temple or centre. One “advantage” of such a lifestyle is that one may wear the robes of, say, the Theravāda, but live in a Mahāyāna temple, and so “need not” observe the traditional Theravāda Vinaya. On the surface, this kind of Buddhist “pluralism” seems admirable, even wholesome. This may seem so to the outsider, the uninformed or those who are not committed to Dharma-Vinaya. This may well be a professionalization of Buddhism, Buddhism as a livelihood or life-insurance.

Pluralism should not be seen or used as some kind form of worldly “skillful means,” an excuse for a convenient lifestyle, in which one may be living off Buddhism; and taking for granted the faith or pious obsequiousness of the majority Buddhists and the nodding silence of the informed minority. We will here instead explore the nobler aspects of pluralism, especially the avenues and bridges that are available for sincere truth-seekers who love truth and goodness available in both Buddhism and other religions.

1.1.2 The rising tide of pluralism

1.1.2.1 Over the last 150 years or so, Western encounters with the Theravāda Buddhism of South and Southeast Asia have not only brought a revival and modernization of an old Asian religion, but opened a new field of academic studies and research in Buddhism. Since 2000, a growing number of scholars have been showing more than just a scholarly interest in Buddhism; they became *Buddhist* scholars.¹⁵

Since then, even Christian scholars have marveled at Buddhism and even practised it. For various reasons, not all such scholars were willing to give up their old religion. In due course, such interests turned into greater commitment to Buddhism by these Christian scholars. It’s not a simple logic of “Why not keep both faiths?” Rather they were compelled to live by or at least accept what they see as goodness in both faiths, Christianity and Buddhism. This basically is **religious dual belonging**, a personal form of religious pluralism.

1.1.2.2 Religious pluralism is the tolerance or acceptance of the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. It also encompasses the state of being where every individual in a religiously diverse society has the rights, freedoms, and safety to practise or not, according to their conscience. It thus includes the freedom, even within a single religion, to reject certain teachings or practices, whether because of doubt or unbelief, or even academic curiosity.

This is a broad definition of religious pluralism, one that not all existing religious systems or faiths can accept for the simple reason that they do not permit all the qualities stated (especially freedom of choice). The very fact that such exclusivity, sectarianism or authoritarianism is man-made means that

¹³ **Secular Buddhism**, in its positive or salutary sense, is a broad term for an emergent form of Buddhism or secular religiosity that is based on humanist, skeptical, or agnostic values, but draws on Buddhist practice: [Wright]. In its negative sense, secular Buddhists tend to be monastics or priests who reject the Vinaya and adopt an intellectual, ritualist or worldly approach to Buddhism, and tend to live independent layman-like lives, such as using money and being socially engaged (in the broad sense of the term).

¹⁴ **Buddhist modernism** generally overlaps with secular Buddhism but includes a revision or reformulation of Buddhist concepts and practices that de-emphasize traditional Buddhist doctrines, cosmology, rituals, monasticism and so on. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with “Protestant Buddhist” or “modern Buddhism” to refer to Asian Buddhism (such as that of Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore) beginning in the 19th century that combined Buddhist ideas and practices with key discourses of Western modernity and Christianity. [McMahan]

¹⁵ See esp (edd) R Jackson & J Makransky, *Buddhist Theology: Critical reflections by contemporary Buddhist scholars*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000.

such strictures will in time become more liberal, or else religion will become significantly weakened in relevance and number, or simply become superstitions to soft-pedal difficult times in our lives.¹⁶

An important question we will explore here is whether **religious dualism** or pluralism is possible, or to what extent? Or, is it disguised as or mistaken for **religious opportunism**, that is, the exploitation of religious ideas or authority, or the spirituality of others for personal gain, partisan interests, or selfish motives. It can involve proselytizing to win others over to one's beliefs, using religion for personal advancement, or disregarding religious principles for personal benefit.

1.1.2.3 Any Christian who is attracted to Buddhism will have either simply ignore or play down the their Bible injunction: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” (Matthew 6.24).¹⁷ Perhaps the very idea of “serving a master”—which is very real in Christianity—is not appealing to the wise seeker.

The Buddha, on the other hand, in **the Udumbarika Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 25) gives this famous open invitation to any “intelligent person, honest, trustworthy, upright,¹⁸ who practises the Dharma, or better, renounces the world, it will take such a one only 7 years or even as short as 7 days to realize the truth:

“I do not speak thus out of desire	<u>to win pupils.</u>
I do not speak thus out of desire	<u>to make you fall from your rules.</u>
I do not speak thus out of desire	<u>to make you fall from your livelihood.</u>
I do not speak thus out of desire	<u>to establish you in teachings considered unwholesome.</u>
I do not speak thus out of desire	<u>to separate you from teachings considered wholesome.</u>

It is for the abandonment of [unwholesome] things that I teach Dharma.¹⁹
 If you practise accordingly, **these defiled states will be abandoned**,
 the states that purify will increase, and *by your direct knowledge*,
you will realize, here and now, the bounty of the accomplishment of wisdom.²⁰ [1.2.5.3]
 D 25,23/3:56 (SD 1.4)

1.2 SERVING TWO MASTERS?

1.2.1 Devoted to the same God, divided by the same God

1.2.1.1 There is a growing trend amongst scholars of religion today of being deeply influenced by the religions they study and teach. Most such scholars tend to have come from a Christian background. As scholars, they are better informed about Buddhism, for example, to which many of them are drawn. In 2016, a collection of essays was published as *Buddhist Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, objections, explorations*.²¹ The first chapter comprises 3 essays by those who affirm dual belonging.²²

¹⁶ On the various ways—inclusivist, exclusivist, pluralist—for interpreting the Buddhist attitude to religious diversity, see R Hayes, “Gotama Buddha and religious pluralism,” *J of Religious Pluralism* 1 1991:65-96; K B Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes Towards Religious Others*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005; (ed) P Schmidt-Leukel, *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions*, St Ottilien: Eos, 2008; J A Vélez de Cea, *The Buddha and Religious Diversity*, London: Routledge, 2013.

¹⁷ The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version, 1971:1178.

¹⁸ “Honest, trustworthy, upright,” *asaṭho amāyāvī uju,jātiko* (= M 2:44/80.16), lit “not treacherous, not deceitful, straightforward.”

¹⁹ On the urgency of avoiding bad, of doing good, see **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65,10-12), SD 35.4a.

²⁰ On the significance of this whole passage, see SD 19.1 (7.3).

²¹ Edd Gavin D’Costa & Ross Thompson, London & NY: Routledge, 2016.

²² These overviews on the first 3 writers have been reproduced from D’Costa & Thompson 2016:vii-ix, 3 f.

1.2.1.2 Rose Drew, who works full time for the charity Interfaith Scotland (Glasgow), wrote “Chasing two rabbits? Dual belonging and the question of salvation/liberation” (2016:13-30). Though she describes herself as a Catholic deeply influenced by Buddhism rather than a dual believer, her chapter draws on her interviews with six dual believers. Drew is a strong advocate of what she terms “authentic” dual belonging.

There is enough convergence between Buddhist and Christian understandings of what the salvific/-liberative transformation requires in the here and now to make possible the pursuit of a single salvific/-liberative path informed by both traditions, even if one is uncertain about the precise nature of the trajectory and final destination of that path. She cites with approval John Hick’s account of the “transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness”²³ as the goal of all religions.

1.2.1.3 A Christian theologian, preacher or any informed Christian will thump the Bible and assert here that the Christian route to salvation is *only* through Christ. By turning to the eightfold path, a Christian *theologically* turns away from Christ. One is thus effectively no more a Christian. Further, if one thinks oneself a Buddhist, how could one then take that a route that is not the eightfold path?

A more serious problem is that even within Christianity itself—with its belief in “one God”—Christians are deeply divided by that very same idea, what more to say or dual belonging? The Anglican and the Eastern Orthodox Church share a common heritage in the historic Christian faith and have a long history of dialogue starting in 1973. The long dialogue has not led to any unity because they also have distinct theological and structural differences.

Historically, Church disunity started with the Nicene Creed (at the Council of Toledo, 589) in the West adding the phrase *filioque*, “and the Son,” stating that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father, but also from the Son. Eastern Orthodoxy maintains that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, emphasizing the Father’s unique role as the source of the Trinity. The issue is not simply a semantic one, but relates to core theological beliefs about God. The Filioque controversy contributed significantly to the Great Schism of 1054, which divided the Western and Eastern Christian churches.²⁴

1.2.1.4 Rose Drew, like these Christians, Eastern and Western, believe in the same God-idea, but only differently. It doesn’t matter what the Churches have in common; ultimately, it is what they believe in that divides them. On the positive side, What Drew believes in with the Buddhists gives her reason for affinity with Buddhism; but she is *not* a Buddhist. If one is a Christian one knows, or should know, that salvation is through Christ; if one is a Buddhist, one works to awaken by way of the path. If one is uncertain or belongs to neither, then one is probably agnostic.

1.2.2 Without Christ I could not be Buddhist

1.2.2.1 Paul Knitter, who wrote the 2nd essay, “The question of salvation/liberation: a double-belonger’s perspective” (2016:31-48), is the Paul Tillich Emeritus Professor of Theology, Religions and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Knitter’s chapter represents the fully Buddhist-Christian position to which he has moved in his new edition of *Without Buddha I Could Not Be Christian*.²⁵ Ironically, the title more significantly implies that “without Christ I could not be Buddhist”!

²³ J Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, (Palgrave Macmillan 1989), 2nd ed, New Haven, CT: Yale Univ Press, 2005:36. Cf K Ward: “Religion is primarily concerned with the transformation of the self, by appropriate response to that which is most truly real” (*Images of Eternity*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987:153).

²⁴ See eg James L Monks, “Relations between Anglicans and Orthodox: Their theological development,” *Theological Studies Journal* 7,3 1946:410-452. [Atlas] 7 May 2025.

²⁵ Orig, NY: OneWorld, 2009.

Knitter's book argues for a "dipolarity" or **complementarity** between his liberationist Christianity with its emphasis on social justice as complementing his Nyingma Tibetan Buddhism with its stress on spiritual transformation. The Buddha teaches that compassion must arise out of spiritual wisdom, while Jesus insists that compassion calls for social justice. Both poles are based on a shared diagnosis and general remedy: suffering (both for self and others) arises from a distorted sense of a separated, ego-clinging self and can be overcome by embodying the compassion/love that arises from awakening or conversion.

1.2.2.2 Like Rose Drew [1.2.1], Paul Knitter, too, believes that Buddhism makes them better Christians. Knitter's sense of "pluralism" is expressed in **the complementarity** he sees in the Christianity and Buddhism. However, complementarity is not "dual belonging": rather, Knitter seems to be saying: "I'm a Christian, but I find Buddhism helpful in formulating my thoughts about Christianity."

While Knitter's pluralism is using the Buddha to inform his Christianity, Drew's dual belief are actually agnostic, that is, she isn't being informed by either Christianity or Buddhism. The rhetorical questions one may want to ask Drew and Knitter is: by all this influence, what is added to their non-Buddhist practice, or how does it contextualize their practice or syncretize with it? Does all this matter to those who really want to practise Buddhism? Anyway, it really matters to each of them individually.

1.2.3 Metacausal variants on a continuum

1.2.3.1 Ross Thompson, who wrote the 3rd essay, "Creation, dependent arising and dual belonging" (2016: 49-67) is a freelance writer. He served 20 years as a parish priest in Bristol, and taught doctrine and ethics at St Michael's, Llandaff (in the north of Cardiff, Wales), and at Cardiff University. Thompson remains Anglican in terms of most of his practice and community belonging, but locates his "journey" or religious quest in a mainly Tibetan Vajrayana perspective.

Thompson argues that theist Christian and atheist Buddhist worldviews are neither opposed nor identical, but variants on a continuum, such that each faith is the "subversive fulfilment" of the other. His argument focuses on the seemingly intractable divide between the two faiths over the notion of creation and a creator God. He argues that creation cannot coherently be understood in terms of efficient causality, and proposes an alternative account in terms of emergent "metacausality." The sharp dichotomy between Christian creation and Buddhist co-arising then gives way to a continuum of possible understandings across which the dual believer may freely roam.

1.2.3.2 It's unlikely that we would find any informed Buddhist who would understand, much less accept, Thompson's notion "*that theist Christian and atheist Buddhist worldviews are neither opposed nor identical, but variants on a continuum.*" The point is clear and simple: one cannot have both God and impermanence. If God is impermanent, he can't be the God in Christian belief. If there is *no* impermanence, then Buddhism is false. We simply cannot have both.

What does it really mean to say that theism and atheism are "neither opposed nor identical"; one could well add, "They are not." Both theism and atheism are defined by their respective points. It's fine if one believes or thinks that creation cannot coherently be understood in terms of "efficient causality." One has picked a side, but it's neither Christianity nor Buddhism. Does Christianity or Buddhism teach that the unwillingness to commit is a virtue? Are we to take this as a case of dual belonging?

1.2.4 Dual belonging leads to dual attachment

1.2.4.1 For me, whose bias is early Buddhism, the most interesting and important essay in *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging* [1.1.2.1] is **Rupert Gethin's** "The Buddhist faith of non-Buddhists: From dual

belonging to dual attachment” (2016: ch 10). Gethin is Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Bristol and President of the Pali Text Society. He specializes in early Indian literature and Indian Buddhist systematic accounts of the mind and meditation. Among Gethin’s works are the helpful introduction, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 1992) and his in-depth study of *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* (2nd ed, Oxford: OneWorld, 2001).²⁶

Gethin’s chapter develops the notion of a quality of commitment that is independent of quantitative doctrinal adherence. According to Theravāda Buddhism, doing what is good can only happen *when the underlying state of mind is good*. Buddhist systematic thought (in the suttas and Abhidhamma) defines a “good” state of mind as one that is characterised by, among other factors, faith (*saddhā*) and spiritual knowledge (*ñāṇa*). In early Buddhist texts these are commonly defined in terms of the core Buddhist doctrines.

1.2.4.2 Nonetheless, Buddhist systematic thought resists the conclusion that good states of mind, and hence faith and knowledge, are therefore restricted to pious Buddhists. In fact, *such states are a possibility for non-Buddhists and even animals*. This suggests an account of faith and knowledge ultimately without reference to specific Buddhist symbols and doctrines. Thus, Gethin envisages a dual belonging that has a provisional status, quite different from the other types proposed in the book, *Buddhist Christian Dual Belonging*.

1.2.5 The Buddha and pluralism

1.2.5.1 There is clear evidence in the suttas showing that religious pluralism existed in early Buddhism: the Buddha actually accommodates non-Buddhists. At that time, Northern India was going through **the 2nd urbanization** (c 500-200 BCE),²⁷ with the rise of the 16 great states (*mahā, janapada*).²⁸ Powerful kings, making use of more efficient iron tools and weapons, conquered a number of these states to form the first Indian empires. This resulted in widespread peace and prosperity in the Central Gangetic Plain.

With stability and progress, more people engaged in agriculture, commerce or their own pursuits. With specialization of labour and a money economy, the region enjoyed growing prosperity and greater leisure time. With more leisure time, more people had the time to engage in non-work-related activities. They had more time to discuss questions of philosophy and religion. There were also those, like many of the wanderers and part-time ascetics [1.2.6.2], who took advantage of the growing prosperity, resorting to a religious life to enjoy a retired life without having to work, living off the charity of the pious and gullible.

The kings and those in power favoured religious teachers, especially those who were influential in encouraging moral conduct amongst the populace. This helped stabilize the expanding and volatile societies and states. Kingdoms, like Magadha and Kosala, were expanding and conquering the republics

²⁶ Orig submitted as a doctoral dissertation to the Dept of Comparative Religion at the Univ of Manchester in 1987.

²⁷ The 2nd Urbanization: Vikas Nain, “Second Urbanization in the chronology of Indian history,” *International J of Academic Research and Development* 3,2 Mar 2018:538-542 esp 539. The 1st Urbanization (3000 BCE onwards), or the Bronze Age in Northern India, saw the rise of towns in the Indus valley centered around Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Lothal, Dholavira etc. These cities were not fortified, agricultural techniques were simple, and there was some commerce with other civilisations such as Mesopotamia and Egypt.

²⁸ The 16 great states were: Aṅga, Magadha, Kāsī, Kosala, Vajjī, Malla, Ceḍi, Vāṁsā, Kuru, Pañcāla, Maccha, Surasena, Assaka, Avantī, Gandhārā, and Kambojā. See SD 4.18 App 3; SD 9 (16): map (16.3); also **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39) @ SD 10.13 (1); **(Tad-ah’) Uposatha S** (A 3.70,18), SD 4.18 & App; SD 57.8 (3.2.2.1); SD 6.1 (1).

(*gana,saṅgha*), such as the Sakya, Vajjī, Mallā and Licchavī.²⁹ In other words, these religious teachers, in teaching moral conduct and non-violence, helped to keep the peace by their teachings.

1.2.5.2 An early Buddhist text, **the Upāli (Gaha,pati) Sutta** (M 56), records the Jain lay follower Upāli's conversion to Buddhism. Listening to the Buddha's teaching on the nature of intentional action (karma), Upāli is moved to go to the 3 jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha—as his refuge. At this, the Buddha reminds him that his family has long supported Jain monks and that it would be appropriate for him to continue offering them alms.³⁰

The Buddha's generosity suggests an attitude sympathetic to dual belonging (or at least a show of professional courtesy): it is possible to become a supporter of Buddhist monks, and hence a Buddhist, while continuing to offer support to Jain monks. Yet the account ends with a bit of a twist. Upāli does indeed continue to offer Jain monks food when they come to his door, but he expressly excludes them from entering his home for the alms meal. That privilege is granted only to Buddhist monks. Upāli, as a streamwinner, chooses to give his priority to the Buddha and his monks.

1.2.5.3 Interestingly, the Buddha is not always recorded as successfully converting his audience. There are a number of occasions when the Buddha is recorded as being unable to convert his audience. The best known of such accounts is that recorded in **the Udumbarikā Sihanāda Sutta** (D 25), where the Buddha lists the following 7 principles for interfaith dialogue, inviting Nigrodha and his wanderer followers to try out the Buddhist training for as briefly as only 7 days:

- (1) Let whoever is your **teacher** remain as your teacher.
- (2) Let your **instructions** remain as your instructions.
- (3) Let your **livelihood** remain as your livelihood.
- (4) Let what you consider **unwholesome** continue to be so considered.
- (5) Let what you consider **wholesome** continue to be so considered.
- (6) The Buddha teaches Dharma for the abandonment of **unwholesome things** that defile, conducing to rebirth, fruiting in future suffering, connected with birth, decay and death.
- (7) Dharma practice is for abandoning mental defilements, for mental purification, for direct knowledge that brings wisdom here and now. (D 25,24/3:57), SD 1.4. [1.1.2.3]

These 7 principles will also work well as the principle for religious pluralism. Clearly, religious pluralism is not about conversion from one religion to another but rather a personal quest for direct knowledge into true reality and spiritual liberation. In this sense, religious pluralism encompasses or overlaps with the highest goals of the major world religions.³¹

1.2.6 A bridging practice for God-believers

1.2.6.1 Early Buddhism famously rejects the notion of a Creator-God and the supplicating of any external agencies, including gods and spirits. Yet, somewhat oddly, the Buddha speaks of making "offerings to deities" (*devata,baṇi*) and of "recollecting the deities" (*devatā'nussati*). Due to the few mentions

²⁹ A 3.70/1:213, 8.42/4:252, 8.43/256, 8.45/4:261.

³⁰ M 56,17/1:370 (SD 27.1). For a discussion of the parallel versions of this story see Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-Nikāya*, 2 vols, Taipei, 2011: 1:320-333. A similar account of the conversion of another Jain general Sīha is told in (**Atthaka**) **Sīha S** (A 8.12/4:180-188; V 1:233-238).

³¹ For a list of refs to texts recording the Buddha not converting his audience, see SD 1.4 (2.4.1).

of such teachings compared to other teachings such as the 4 noble truths and breath meditation, we may conclude that the 2 teachings on deities are special teachings for special people.

These “special people” are those who are not ready to give up **worship of deities** (*devatā*) or the God-idea on account of past conditioning. This broad term, *devatā*, is here taken to include whatever kinds of “non-human” beings that the non-Buddhists have been worshipping. The offerings (*bālī*) to such deities, however, are made in the context of **giving**, as part of the prudent apportioning of one’s wealth.

1.2.6.2 At least 2 suttas present the teachings of the “**fivefold offerings**” (*pañca, bālī*), which are as follows:

(1) offering to relatives,	<i>ñāti, bālī</i>
(2) offering to guests, ³²	<i>atithi, bālī</i>
(3) offering to the departed,	<i>pubba.peta, bālī</i>
(4) offering to the king [the government], ³³ and	<i>rāja, bālī</i>
(5) offering to deities [devas]. ³⁴	<i>devatā, bālī</i>

This teaching on the fivefold offerings—which clearly represents the Buddha’s response to the Vedic “5 great sacrifices” (*pañca mahā, yajña*)³⁵—are given in **the Patta Kamma Sutta** (A 4.61) and **the Ādiya Sutta** (A 5.41), both of which state that such a practice is one of the benefits of “wealth gotten by work and zeal, gathered by the strength of arm, earned by the sweat of the brow, justly obtained in a lawful way.”³⁶

If we take the practice of the fivefold offerings as the Buddha’s advice on *worldly happiness* (such as bringing happiness here and now), the Buddha then teaches **the recollection of devas** (*devatā’nussati*) for mental and spiritual growth. This practice has nothing to do with worshipping of devas (which is not taught by the Buddha). Rather it is meant for non-Buddhists who are deeply rooted in some kind of theistic or supernatural beliefs. They are to recollect the virtues of these devas or deities, that is, what makes them *good*, and similar wholesome qualities.

1.2.6.3 For Buddhists who are inclined to look up to devas or believe in spirits, one helpful contemplative practice is that of a recollection of Lord Sakra. There are numerous stories about Sakra in the suttas, who, like a Buddhist Apollo, has his love stories, too. However, for contemplative practice, it is advantageous to be familiar with inspiring and instructive stories about Sakra, such as the 25 suttas preserved in **the Sakka Saṃyutta** (S 11.1-25) and elsewhere.

A few selected passages or episodes from these suttas may be used in a *devatā’nussati*:

Sakka,pañha Sutta	D 21/2:263-289	SD 54.8	How Sakra became a streamwinner;
Subhāsita Jaya Sutta	S 11.5/1:222-224	SD 54.6b	Well spoken words;
Isayo Araññakā Sutta	S 11.9/1:226	SD 54.21	Sakra is respectful to seers;
Vata,pada Sutta	S 11.11/1:228	SD 54.12	Sakra’s 7 vows;
Sakka,nāma Sutta	S 11.12/1:229	SD 54.19	on Sakra’s names;

³² See **Love**, SD 38.4 (5.2.2).

³³ *Rāja, bālī*, ie, paying due taxes, levies and fines, and contributing to building public projects, etc.

³⁴ “Offering to devas,” *devatā, bālī*. See **Ādiya S** (A 5.41,5), SD 2.1 (2-3). On Buddhism and culture (godliness), see SD 52.1 (18.3.2.4).

³⁵ Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 2.10 lists the foll “5 great sacrifices”: the sacrifice to devas (*deva, yajña*), libations to ancestors (*pitṛ, yajña*), offering of food to creatures (esp animals) (*bhūta, yajña*), feeding guests (*manusya, yajña*), and the perfect sacrifice (chanting the Vedas) (*brahma, yajña*).

³⁶ **A 4.61,12** (SD 37.12); **A 5.41,5** + SD 2.1 (2+3).

Sakka Vatthu	DhA 15.8/3:269-272	SD 54.20	Sakra tends to the Buddha;
Devatā'nussati	(a study)	SD 15.13 (2)	on Sakra.

1.2.6.4 The recollection of deities (*devatā'nussati*) is also an excellent bridging practice for God-believing non-Buddhists who are drawn to Buddhism, which rejects any notion of the monotheistic God. One can reflect on various wholesome qualities of such a God that one is familiar with (sans any negative or unhelpful qualities, such as jealousy, anger, vengeance, etc). Helpful ideas for reflection include the following, that:

- God is infinite with neither beginning nor end;
- He is immutable unchanging and immeasurable like space;
- He is self-sufficient he has neither need nor lust;
- He is omnipotent he has full self-mastery;
- He is omniscient he knows all that can be known;³⁷
- He is omnipresent he is always present in the present (here and now) like my mind now;
- He is wise he well knows just the right thing for me or anyone;
- He is faithful he is always true to me, making me a whole and true person;
- He is good his kindness heals me, making even as I show my kindness to others;
- He is just he works rightly and truly in all my thoughts, speech and actions;
- He is merciful he is compassionate to me even when I do not deserve it;
- He is gracious he is filled with lovingkindness, accepting me just as I am;
- He is loving he unconditionally accepts me just like I am his only child;³⁸
- He is holy he is well above the world and all worldliness;
- He is glorious he is beautiful and great; he makes me feel beautiful and great.

One only needs to select one or a few of these qualities, reflecting on them mindfully in meditation. The idea is to fill oneself with great joy (*pīti*). Once the joy arises, stay with it (smiling at it if one is inclined to), letting it pervade one's whole being. Upon emerging from this joyful state, one may then go on to the breath meditation. If this is still difficult, then try cultivating lovingkindness (*mettā*); and then try to do the breath meditation again.³⁹

1.3 FAITH IN A PLURALIST CONTEXT

1.3.1 Don't non-Buddhists have faith, too?

1.3.1.1 According to the Abhidhamma, in its Buddhist ethic of intention, good acts (*kamma*) of body, speech and mind are acts done only with a wholesome mind (*kusala, citta*). It is not possible to do a good act when one has an unwholesome mind (*akusala, citta*).⁴⁰ Yet if *saddhā* (faith) is a necessary condition of a wholesome mind, and *saddhā* is understood as faith in the Buddha, Dharma and sangha, that is, something characteristically and exclusively Buddhist, then it would seem that only Buddhists can have wholesome states of mind; hence, that only Buddhists can do good deeds.

This seems to run directly counter to the Buddhist ethic of intention: what makes a deed good is not that it is done by a Buddhist, but that it is motivated by the opposites of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*)

³⁷ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

³⁸ See **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8), SD 38.3.

³⁹ See **Devatā'nussati** (SD 15.13).

⁴⁰ See R Gethin, "Can killing a living being ever be an act of compassion? The analysis of the act of killing in the Abhidhamma and Pali Commentaries," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 2004:167-202.

and delusion (*moha*), namely, by non-attachment, lovingkindness and wisdom. These 3 qualities are wholesome states, not the *status* of being a Buddhist or that of a non-Buddhist.

Gethin, in his article, “The Buddhist faith of non-Buddhists,” asks:

Can it really be the case that non-Buddhists never have such selfless motivations? We might conclude that what we have discovered here is an egregious example of the unthinking manner in which the Buddhist scholastics re-envisioned what the Buddha taught, making of it a religion with absolute distinctions between insiders who have the opportunity to progress towards liberation and outsiders who are excluded from even the opportunity of performing the kind of good deed that would allow a better rebirth. Yet such a conclusion is certainly in tension, if not clear contradiction, with various explicit principles and statements in the extant Abhidharma literature. (Gethin 2016:181)

1.3.1.2 The question of whether non-Buddhists can have what Buddhists call “**faith**” is one that has been explicitly raised in the context of contemporary exegesis of Buddhist Abhidhamma. To compound the issue, even amongst Buddhists themselves, there is no consensus over the nature of **faith** (*saddhā*). A salient case (pointed out by Gethin 2016:181-183) is that made by the Sri Lankan monk **Narada Thera** (1898–1983) in the 1950s in his *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, a translation of the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha. Having suggested that **faith** is to be understood as “well-established confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha,” Narada comments: “one might question whether a non-Buddhist could also possess this *Saddhā*.”⁴¹

Narada then cites a passage from **the Attha,sālinī**, a 5th-century CE commentary to the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī, the first book of the canonical Abhidhamma (ca 2nd century BCE), in which its author,⁴² comments on the absence of the mental quality of **faith** (*saddhā*) from all but wholesome (*kusala*) types of consciousness.

In this [unwholesome] *citta* the qualities (*dhamma*) of faith, mindfulness, wisdom and the six pairs are not accepted. Why not? Because when the mind lacks faith there is no conviction (*pasāda*). So there is no faith at all. Does that mean those who hold false views (*diṭṭhi,gatika*) do not have faith in their own teachers? They do, but it is not faith. It is mere approval of what their teachers say (*vacana,sampañchana,mattam*). In fact, it is either a lack of investigation (*anupa-parikkhā*) or a [false] view (*diṭṭhi*). (DhsA 249 f)

“How are we to take this comment?” asks Gethin (2016:182).

We might take it as reiterating a form of simplistic Buddhist scholastic chauvinism: “faith” means faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha; only Buddhists can have true faith in their teachers because only Buddhist teachers teach a proper view of things. Non-Buddhists, on the other hand, even though they are enthused by what their teachers say, cannot have true faith because what their teachers teach is a false view of things. This appears to be how Nārada himself understands the Atthasālinī’s comment, though he is clearly somewhat troubled by it, suggesting that the Atthasālinī’s answer to the question of whether or not non-Buddhists can have faith “is rather unsatisfactory and inadequate”:

⁴¹ Nārada, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, 2 vols, Colombo, 1956-57 1:99 f; “5th ed” 1987:123 f. This whole discussion is expurgated from the new (ed) Bodhi et al, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Kandy, 1993, 3rd ed 2006.

⁴² Anuruddha of Polonnaruva (Sri Lanka), 8th-12th cent, an associate of the commentator Buddhaghosa.

“If *saddhā* is limited only to Buddhists, what shall we say when a non-Buddhist places his faith or confidence in his teacher? Surely his mind also gets purified to some extent when he thinks of his particular religious teacher. Could it be *diṭṭhi*—false view? Then it is immoral (*akusala*). In such a case there is no occasion for a non-Buddhist to experience a moral consciousness. Would it not be more correct to say that *saddhā* is mere confidence or faith, instead of restricting to the Triple Gem?” (Narada, 1956-57:102) (Gethin 2016:182)

1.3.1.3 As a solution to his problem, Narada goes on to refer to the list of near-synonyms or alternative terms for *saddhā* given in the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī by way of definition, namely, “having faith (*sadda-hanā*), trusting (*okappanā*), complete confidence (*abhippasādo*), faith (*saddhā*), the faculty of faith (*saddh’indriya*), the power of faith (*saddhā,bala*)” (Dhs 10 f; DhsA 145,1-17), with the implication that such terms are indicative of a more general confidence or trust that need not be exclusively Buddhist—that is, need not be directed towards the Buddha, Dharma and sangha in the manner he thinks is assumed by the commentary’s explanation.

“In fact,” concludes Gethin, “I think Nārada is certainly right in his interpretation of ‘faith’ here. Where I think he is wrong, however, is in his interpretation of the commentary as saying something at odds with this.” (2016:183).

1.3.2 The Buddhist faith of non-Buddhists

1.3.2.1 How then do we define **faith** so that it keeps to the spirit of early Buddhism and also embraces non-Buddhists who seek truth and liberation in Buddhism? We can be truly hopeful here since we have clear evidence of how the suttas view faith. I shall discuss only 2 key phrases from the suttas regarding faith, that is, “not by faith” [below] and “free your faith” [1.3.3]. We will then re-look at a definition of faith that both reflects early Buddhism and also embraces a non-Buddhist faith in the Dharma.

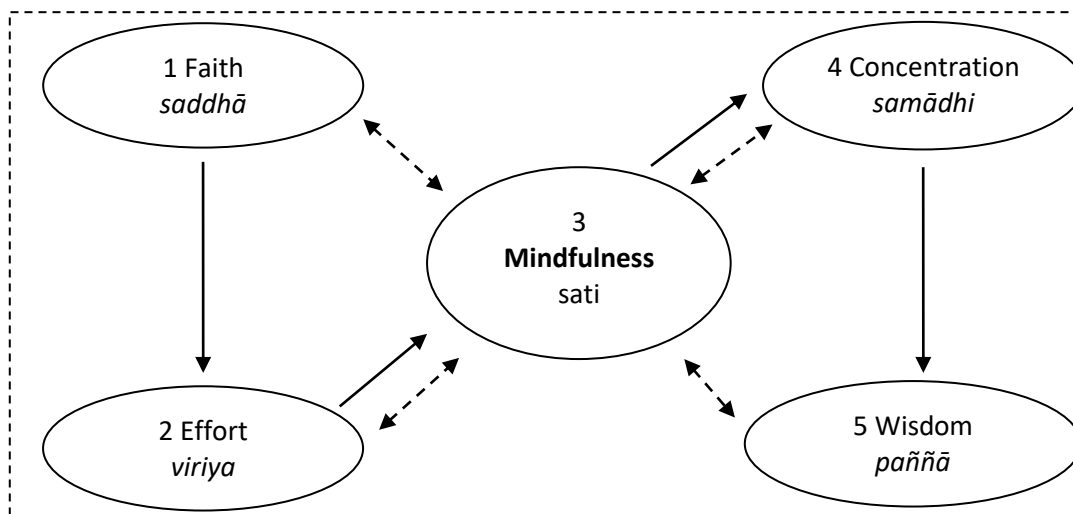


Diagram 1.2.2.2 The 5 spiritual faculties.⁴³

⁴³ See SD 10.4 (2); SD 54.2f (3.2.2.1); SD 101.7 (2.2.3).

1.3.2.2 One of the key teachings in Buddhist practice is that of **the 5 faculties** (*pañc'indriya*),⁴⁴ which are needed for a meditator working to reach the path or to at least attain dhyana; that is, *faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom*. As a rule, we are often drawn to a religion or religious practice by our **faith** in it. That faith motivates us to exert **effort** into the practice, whether it is keeping the precepts, studying the suttas, attending Dharma classes, going for retreats or meditating. Through some coaching and instructions, we learn to apply **mindfulness**, and with habitual mindfulness, we experience mental **concentration**, which is the basis for insight **wisdom**. Essentially, this is the application of the spiritual faculties over time (diachronically) or in the long term. Notice that faith is only one of 5 spiritual faculties; though it is listed first, it is not the dominant one. [Diagram 1.2.2.2]

On the other hand, we could be putting in too much physical effort, tiring ourself; or we could be over-exerting ourself mentally. Mindfully, we harmonize our physical effort with our mental effort. The bottom line is that **faith** is only *one* of the 5 faculties in spiritual practice, and it needs to work with the other 4 faculties for us to progress spiritually. We may start off such a practice as a non-Buddhist, but the same rules regarding balancing the faculties apply. This harmonizing process is represented by the double-headed broken arrows [Diagram 1.2.2.2].

In the short-term (synchronically), that is, depending on the circumstances, we may need to have more faith in ourself or the practice, or conversely, we need to have a better understanding, wisdom, of what we are doing; or we need to keep a harmonious balance between mere faith and pure intellectual understanding of the practice. Mindfulness helps us keep our practice in a harmonious balance for the best effect. This process is represented by the directional dark arrows. [Diagram 1.2.2.2]

1.3.2.3 Despite the arhat's unshakeable faith in the 3 jewels, we sometimes encounter a remarkably humorous display of acumen, such as the houselord **Citta Gahapati's** statement that it is "not by faith" that he was liberated. **The Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta** (S 41.8) recounts that the Jain leader, Nātaputta, asks Citta about his faith in the Buddha, Citta gives a surprising reply, which goes thus:

"Houselord, do you have faith in the recluse Gotama when he says, 'There is a concentration without initial application and sustained application, there is a cessation of initial application and sustained application?'"

[Citta:] "Here, bhante, **I do not go by faith** in the Blessed One ... " (*na khvāham ettha bhante bhagavato **saddhāya gacchāmi** ...*). (S 41.8,5/4:298), SD 40.7

Misconstruing Citta's reply, Nātaputta thinks that Citta has no faith in the Buddha and Citta agrees that initial and sustained applications cannot cease in dhyana. Nātaputta then loudly proclaims this, that is, until Citta has to correct him by explaining that one reaches the path of liberation "not by faith," but through one's own mastery of dhyana meditation. On account of his direct knowledge of the mind, it is liberated; on account of this, Citta has total wise faith in the Buddha!⁴⁵

1.3.2.4 The story behind the enigmatic **Dh 97** is about the arhat Sāriputta's remark on his awakening. **The Pubba Koṭṭhaka Sutta** (S 48.44) relates the Buddha asking Sāriputta whether he has faith (*sad-dahā'si tvam sāriputta*) that the 5 faculties (*pañc'indriya*) of *faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom*, when practised, lead to nirvana (*amata,pariyosānam*).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Pañc'indriya*, SD 10.4; SD 3.6 (3); SD 54.3h (3.1).

⁴⁵ SD 40a.8 (5.6.3). On further significance of Citta's faith and knowing, see Gethin 2001:109 f.

⁴⁶ S 48.44/5:220 (SD 10.7); also SD 40a.8 (5.6.2).

Sāriputta replies that he does *not* here go by faith in the Buddha in this matter (*na bhagavato sad-dhāya gacchāmi*). Having realized the truth for himself, he is without any doubt (*nibbiccikichā*) in the matter. The Dhammapada Commentary records the Buddha as declaring this of Sāriputta:

Indeed, Sāriputta goes not by faith in others, for the reason that he has by himself attained the truth of the path and fruit by way of insight based on dhyana (*jhāna, vipassanā, magga, phala, - dhammesu*). (DhA 7.8/2:186 f ad Dh 97), SD 10.6

<i>Assaddho akataññū ca sandhi-c,chedo ca yo naro hatâvakāso vantāso sa ve uttama,poriso.</i>	Not through faith, but knowing the unmade, the man who has broken the connection, eliminated the opening (for rebirth), given up desire— he is indeed a supreme person. (Dh 97; cf Dh 383)
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1.3.3 Free your faith!

1.3.3.1 The Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta (M 26), the oldest canonical biography of the Buddha that we have, tells us that after agreeing to Mahā Brahmā’s invitation to teach the Dharma, the Buddha declares:

<i>Apārūtā tesam amatassa dvārā ye sotavanto pamuñcantu saddham vihimsa,saññī paguṇam na bhāsim dhammam pañitam manujesu brahme</i>	Open to them are the doors to the death-free, ⁴⁷ (O Brahma), for those with ears, <u>let them free (their) faith!</u> ⁴⁸ Perceiving trouble, I did not speak the refined, sublime Dharma among humans, O Brahmā. ⁴⁹
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What is of interest here is the enigmatic phrase, “**Let them free (their) faith!**” (*pamuñcantu sad-dham*). This is one of the lingering Buddhist textual mysteries that has not been satisfactorily translated or explained. After working on this paper, I think I have a better idea of its significance, especially in the broader sense of the universal acceptance and practice of Buddhism. I’m quite convinced that this is the best explanation of the phrase we have so far.

1.3.3.2 The Pali phrase, *pamuñcantu saddham* literally means “Free faith!” (that is, liberate faith, set it free). The verb *pamuñcantu* is in the 2nd person plural imperative, that is, literally, “You all free your faith!” Clearly, the Buddha is addressing his future audience, that is, the world, which includes you and me. We are to “free our faith.” To begin with, this “faith” is what we have right now, that is, what we believe now, before we have gained the path of freedom to become streamwinners and so on.

The question now is **what is it that faith needs to be freed from?** From what we have been studying here it is obvious that we need to *free* our faith from **the mental hindrances**: from *sensual pleasures, from ill will, from sloth and torpor, from restlessness and worry, and from doubt*.⁵⁰ With that free mind, we are then able to cultivate **the 7 awakening factors**: *mindfulness, dharma-investigation, effort, zest, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity*.⁵¹ [13.2.3]. We then progress closer to the path of awakening, either as good lay practitioners or, ideally, as streamwinners and so on.

⁴⁷ “The doors to the death-free” (*amatassa dvārā*) = the noble path (*ariya, magga*) (VA 963).

⁴⁸ On this difficult sentence, see esp SD 12.2 (3).

⁴⁹ M 26,21.5 (SD 1.11); SD 12.2 (3). This verse: (BHS) *apāvṛtam me amṛtasya dvāram | brahmeti bhagavantam ye śrotukāmā | śraddhām pramuñcantu viheṭṭha, sañjīmām || viheṭṭha, sañjīmo praguṇo abhūsi | dharmo aśuddho magadheṣu pūrvam ||* (Mvst 3:319, Senart). BHS: sv viheṭṭhā, however, says that Senart’s text is “very corrupt” (Edgerton 1953: 50). For a detailed study, see SD 12.2 (3).

⁵⁰ SD 62.6a (1.2.2.1).

⁵¹ SD 62.6a (1.2.2.3).

2 The Buddhist faith of non-Buddhists

2.1 TWO TYPES OF FAITH

2.1.1 Rootless faith and wise faith

2.1.1.1 Early Buddhism speaks of 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*):

- (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith;⁵²
- (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravatī, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing;⁵³ also called “wise faith” (*avecca-p, pasāda*).⁵⁴

Rootless faith is so called because it is not rooted in one’s own experience of true reality. It is merely belief in what has been said or communicated by another, whether a teacher or some figure of authority. The most serious flaw in such a faith is that the object of faith is *outside* of oneself, such as in a God-idea, a preacher, a Guru or a religious object. Such a faith is then easily controlled or manipulated by those who define that object of faith or whoever wields power over the belief system. In fact, such a faith or belief system is really neither religious nor spiritual, it is a *political* system of sorts since it is power-based. Political systems are ephemeral and provide only worldly benefits at best, even then not always in an equitable way.

Faith with a good cause arises from personal experience or right understanding of how causes and effects work. This wholesome faith is further consolidated by one asking *the right questions* so that one’s doubts are cleared and one understands the answers. Hence, faith with a good cause is also called wise faith (*avecca-p, pasāda*).

2.1.2 Cognitive faith and affective faith

2.1.2.1 A number of scholars⁵⁵ have discussed the psychological aspects of these 2 kinds of faith, calling them cognitive faith and affective faith respectively. In the Buddhist context, **cognitive faith** means trust or belief by way of having “seen, heard, sensed, known” (*diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*) from another.⁵⁶ In other words, what is true reality (*yathā, bhūta*) is not directly known for oneself (*sandiṭṭhika*). This second kind of faith is known as **affective faith**, trust or confidence that arises from directly experiencing true reality. One has seen true reality which, in some way, has transformed one into a truly better wholesome person.

As a rule, *saddhā* as used in the suttas is always positive, that is, as affective faith, functioning as the launching pad for direct knowing, true wisdom and liberation. Hence, affective faith is also called “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravatī, saddhā*), or “wise faith (*avecca-p, pasāda*),⁵⁷ that is, faith founded on seeing.⁵⁸

⁵² Caṅkī S (M 95,14/2:170), SD 21.15.

⁵³ Vīmaṅsaka S (M 47,16/1:320,8), SD 35.6; Apanṇaka S (M 60,4/1:401,23), SD 35.5. See SD 10.2 (2.2).

⁵⁴ Pañca Vera Bhaya S 1 (S 12.41,11/2:69), SD 3.3(4.2). See *Ency of Religion & Ethics* (ERE): Faith, & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387.

⁵⁵ E Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, London, 1962:47-50. J T Ergardt, *Faith and Knowledge in Early Buddhism, An analysis of the contextual structures of an arahant-formula in the Majjhima-Nikāya* Leiden: E J Brill, 1977:145. J R Carter, *Dhamma: Western academic approaches and Sinhalese interpretations*, Tokyo, 1978:104. Gethin, 2001: 107-109. For a good overview on faith in early Buddhism, see Gethin 2001:106-112; other refs, see 2001:106 n7.

⁵⁶ See SD 3.13 (5.2); SD 53.5 (2 f). For other phrases, see DEB sv diṭṭha suta

⁵⁷ Pañca Vera Bhaya S 1 (S 12.41,11/2:69), SD 3.3(4.2). See *Ency of Religion & Ethics* (ERE): Faith, & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387.

⁵⁸ Vīmaṅsaka S (M 47,16/1:320,8), SD 35.6; Apanṇaka S (M 60,4/1:401,23) SD 35.5. See SD 10.4 (2.2).

On the other hand, when faith is used in the negative sense, such as in “**blind faith**,” the term “rootless faith” (*amūlika saddhā*) is used or meant. Such a faith, ironically, has no faith in the good or in others, but that “everything” is “I, me, mine,” including religion, or we see it as “something” (*kiñcana*) to have or to be. Hence, our faith can and must only be in *the very first of all truths: all things are impermanent*, so that we see things as they really are, and we will be on the right path.⁵⁹

2.1.2.2 Rupert Gethin, in his *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, is convinced that *saddhā* has, as a rule, a positive sense as used in the suttas:

Thus there seems to be no need to impart *saddhā* with the meaning “belief,” and understand it as directly cognitive in nature, an inferior kind of “knowledge.” It seems to me that ... *saddhā* is still best understood as a positive mental attitude of trust or confidence.⁶⁰ Obviously from the point of view of translation having a positive mental attitude towards something—when, for example, that something is a proposition—can be very little different from “believing” it. But from the point of view of the technical philosophical understanding of the Nikāyas, the point is of some importance: *saddhā* is always essentially affective in nature. Terms such as *pema* (“affection”) and *bhatti* (“devotion”), which are often juxtaposed and associated with *saddhā* in the Nikāyas, only serve to reiterate this essentially affective nature.⁶¹ (Gethin 2001:110 f)

Gethin strongly criticizes K N Jayatilleke’s assumption that one can understand *saddhā* as having a straightforward cognitive value like “belief” which leads Jayatilleke to some serious misunderstandings. Thus, Jayatilleke talks in terms of the “belief” with which the *bhikkhu* or *ariya-sāvaka* starts with, being “replaced by direct personal knowledge.”⁶² But this, argues Gethin, is to ignore much of the treatment of the 5 faculties (*pañc’indriya*) in the Nikāyas.⁶³

The relationship between faith (*saddhā*) and knowledge (*ñāṇa*) or wisdom (*paññā*) is in fact more in the nature of that between these two different but complementary factors. *Saddhā* is seen primarily as vital in initiating spiritual practice, but although it may not be as crucial in the higher stages of the Buddhist path it is certainly misleading to talk of it as being *replaced* by *ñāṇā*.⁶⁴

2.1.2.3 The reciprocal relationship that exists between *saddhā* and *paññā* is well illustrated by the following passage from **the Āpaṇa Sutta** (S 48.50):

The confident (*saddha*) *ariya-sāvaka* having repeatedly endeavoured so, having repeatedly been mindful so, having repeatedly practised concentration so, having repeatedly known so, thus becomes fully confident (*abhisaddahati*):

⁵⁹ **A 5.141/3:165**: *ekacco puggalo ittara, saddho hoti ittara, bhatti ittara, pemo ittara-p, pasādo* (negative sense).

⁶⁰ The nearest one gets to *saddhā* as “belief” and having cognitive value is perhaps **M 31/1:211**: there are some *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* who affirm (*paṭijānāti*) a basis for the holy life (*brahma, cariya*) solely on account of *saddhā*, such as those who reason (*takkī*) and speculate (*vīmaṃsī*). Here those who place confidence or trust in their own reason as grounds for belief are contrasted with those whose ground is the authority of the Vedas; cf Jayatilleke 1963:170 f. (Gethin’s fn)

⁶¹ **M 22/1:142, 65/1:444, 70/1:479**: *tathāgate c’assa saddhā, mattarā hoti pema, mattarā*.

⁶² Jayatilleke 1963:399; Gethin’s emphasis.

⁶³ In fact, adds Gethin (2001:111 n23), Jayatilleke can maintain his thesis only by dismissing certain passages as later and so reflecting an entirely different conception of *saddhā* (1963:399 f).

⁶⁴ On the nature of *ñāṇa*, “knowledge,” see **Knowledge, language and reality** (SD 62.18c).

“Those dharmas which were previously only heard of by me—I now dwell having experienced them with my own body [personally]; having penetrated them by wisdom, I see them.”⁶⁵

Thus *saddhā* is the instigator of a process which culminates in *paññā* which in turn reinforces *saddhā*. As J R Carter expresses it:

Saddhā and *paññā* when taken together do not fit into “faith and reason.” Rather, they express a dynamic process where *saddhā* is active in one wanting to know, coming to know in part and *paññā* becomes more pervasive in one coming to know and knowing fully, in truth.⁶⁶

This basic conception of *saddhā* as initiating and driving a process that culminates in liberating knowledge (*ñāṇā*) has been well traced and discussed by a number of other scholars.⁶⁷

2.2 FAITH AND VIEWS⁶⁸

2.2.1 Being a Buddhist and being Buddhist

2.2.1.1 Being a Buddhist does not preclude one from having wrong views; being a non-Buddhist does not preclude one from having right view. However, this does not mean that when a non-Buddhist understands the Dharma well enough he will reach the path of awakening. One’s spiritual being is not defined by what one knows or believes but rather by one’s mental state and by how one behaves. Very simply, one is a true Buddhist only when one *keeps the precepts* (the 5 precepts for the laity or the Vinaya for monastics) and has a mind *free from greed, hatred and delusion*.

These are the ideas we will explore in this section. We will refer to some interesting passages from **the Paṭṭhāna**, the 7th and last book of the Abhidhamma and the least studied of the Buddhist texts. While all the other Abhidhamma texts examine Buddhist teachings analytically (*bheda*), it is said that only the Paṭṭhāna examines them synthetically (*saṅgha*), putting the parts together and seeing them as a whole.

The Abhidhamma presents a view of reality by way of 2 complementary methods: analysis and synthesis (*bheda, saṅgha, naya*). The task of analysis is to show that the objects of our ordinary conceptual thought are not substantial entities or irreducible realities. The task of synthesis is to show that the ultimate factors into which they are reducible (the *dharmas*; anglicized as dharmas) are not distinct entities existing in themselves, but interdependent nodes in a complex web of relationships. To accomplish this latter task, the Abhidhamma applies a theory of **conditional relations** (*paccay’ākāra*), a theory set forth in the Paṭṭhāna.⁶⁹

2.2.1.2 There are teachings in **the Paṭṭhāna** that explicitly state that false views are not the special preserve of non-Buddhists:

⁶⁵ S 48.50/5:226: *saddho so bhante ariya, sāvako evaṃ padahitvā padahitvā evaṃ saritvā saritvā evaṃ samādahitvā samādahitvā evaṃ pajānitvā pajānitvā evaṃ abhisaddahati: ime kho te dhammā ye me pubbe sutavā ahesuṃ, te dānāham etarahi kāyena ca phusitvā viharāmi, paṃmāya ca ativijjha passāmī ti.* (SD 10.4(4.4))

⁶⁶ J R Carter 1978:104.

⁶⁷ See esp J R Carter 1978:103-106; also J T Ergardt 1977:144-146.

⁶⁸ This section is partly based on Gethin 2016:187-195, with some editing, esp the sources, so as to fit the context here.

⁶⁹ See Y Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, Hong Kong, 2010:8, 20 f, 262-281. R Gethin also presents a easy-to-read introduction to Abhidhamma teachings, esp Paṭṭhāna, on views in 2016:186-193, much of which I have used in this section.

A wholesome quality may be a causal condition for an unwholesome quality by way of the causal condition (*ārammaṇa, paccaya*) of being a thought-object. When having given a gift, undertaken the precepts, or fulfilled the religious observances of the full and new moon days, one is pleased and happy about those things and then, with reference to those things, greed arises, a [false] view arises, doubt arises, anxiety arises, unhappiness arises.⁷⁰

(Paṭ:Be 405/1:133)

In a similar way, unwholesome qualities may arise where the object of thought is past good deeds, the attainment of dhyana and the emerging from dhyana.⁷¹ Later the same point is made with reference to “the causal condition of dominance” (*adhipati, paccaya*) and “causal condition of immediate support” (*upanissaya, paccaya*). (Paṭ:Be 136, 146)

The Abhidhamma thus allows for the possibility of right view, and hence **faith**, outside of Buddhism. The Paṭṭhāna teachings thus turn the tables: it is explained how Buddhist ideas and practices can also become the object of unwholesome attachment in the form of false views. This means that in fact from the perspective of the Paṭṭhāna, those of false view mentioned in the Atthasālinī (Dhamma, saṅgaṇī Commentary) as having a quasi-‘faith’ in their teachers’ words can on occasion include Buddhists. Being pleased and happy about one’s Buddhist ideas and practices, or with the teacher’s charisma, is not necessarily a mark of true faith according to the Paṭṭhāna’s presentation of the types of consciousness set out in the Dhammasaṅgaṇi (eg Dhs 78).

The bottom line is that even Buddhists can have wrong views about Buddhism. For that very reason, there is a need for Dharma and sutta study, instructions from teachers, personal practice and the “straightening of one’s views” (*diṭṭhi’ju, kamma*) as a “ground for merit” (*puñña, kiriya, vatthu*).⁷² This is also possible for non-Buddhists; the more wholesome their understanding of Buddhism, the more *wholesome* they are as Buddhists. Hence, it is not a matter of becoming *a Buddhist* but of being Buddhist.

2.2.2 The early Abhidhamma on views

2.2.2.1 Another surprising teaching in this context can be found in the early post-canonical text, **the Nettī-p, pakaraṇa**, which speaks of the possibility of *a wholesome form of the most unwholesome of qualities*, namely, craving (*taṇhā*). We are familiar with the fact that unwholesome craving makes one act in ways that draw one further away from nirvana, feeding the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra, gāminī*). On the other hand, there is a wholesome craving, a craving to abandon defilements, a craving that motivates conduct bringing one *closer to nirvana*, leading eventually to the ending of the cycle of rebirth (*apacaya, gāminī pahāna, taṇhā*).⁷³

Here, the Nettippakaraṇa resolves that most obvious of Buddhist dilemmas: if nirvana, the goal of the Buddhist path, is the cessation of all desire, what of the desire to reach nirvana? Surely that is a good craving. The ancient commentary adds that this “wholesome” craving is not, however, “wholesome” in the strictest and absolute sense, it is only relatively (*pariyāyena*) “wholesome.” It suggests that craving

⁷⁰ *Kusalo dhammo akusalassa dhammassa ārammaṇa, paccayena paccayo. Dānaṃ datvā, sīlaṃ samādiyitvā, uposatha, kammaṃ katvā taṃ assādeti abhinandati, taṃ ārabha rāgo uppajjati, diṭṭhi uppajjati, vicikicchā uppajjati, uddhaccaṃ uppajjati, domanassaṃ uppajjati. Pubbe suciṇṇāni assādeti abhinandati, taṃ ārabha rāgo uppajjati, diṭṭhi uppajjati, vicikicchā uppajjati, uddhaccaṃ uppajjati, domanassaṃ uppajjati.* (Paṭ:Be 405/1:133)

⁷¹ Cf also the warning that the kind of joy and happiness that arises by way of thinking “our Buddha, our Dharma, our sangha” is connected with greed and so an obstacle to progress in meditation (DA 1:54).

⁷² Abhidhamma Mātikā (Be) 33. As *puñña, kiriya, vatthu*; DA 1:231, 999; Abhs 5.24.

⁷³ Nett 87, D 3:216; cf Peṭk 97; NettA:Be 147.

can be called “wholesome” not because it is in itself wholesome, but because it is directed towards something wholesome, presumably, as the Paṭṭhāna has it, Buddhist ideas and practices:

Here “wholesome” means “having wholesome qualities as its object.” The word “wholesome” should be understood here in the sense of “not blamable.” But why is craving specified here as something wholesome? By specifying craving as the cause of distorted views, how it contributes to the defiling side of things is shown. However, by switching perspective, craving is specified as something wholesome in order to show that in this case it is precisely craving that can also contribute to the purification side of things.⁷⁴ (NettA:Be 147)

The point here is that craving is always strictly “unwholesome” and deluded, yet some forms of craving are better than others, some forms of craving are not blamable (*anavajja*). Thus craving for sense-objects or attachment to the view that actions have no consequences will only make matters worse; but craving for good deeds, the bliss of meditation, or the idea of nirvana as peace can motivate actions that make things better, despite really being just more craving for good deeds, the bliss of meditation or the peace of nirvana, while still, ultimately, are just more craving, can motivate actions that make things better. Yet like all craving it has its dangers for the unawakened.

2.2.2.2 These dangers of craving are highlighted in the Paṭṭhāna in its exposition of “the causal condition of immediate support” (*upanissaya, paccaya*). Here the Paṭṭhāna provides more details of how wholesome qualities can condition the arising of unwholesome qualities:

Immediately dependent on faith, ... on virtue, ... on learning, ... on generosity, ... on wisdom one generates pride, one holds to a false view: by way of the causal condition of immediate support of faith, ... virtue, ... learning, ... generosity, ... wisdom becomes a causal condition for greed, hatred, delusion, conceit, view, desire.⁷⁵ (Paṭ:Be 1:147)

2.2.2.3 The commentary explains further:

Thinking, “I am someone with faith and confidence,” one produces pride. Not investigating (*anupaparikkhanto*) by wisdom the meaning of what one has reached by virtue of faith in some statement, one holds to a false view, such as “a person exists.”

Thinking, “I am virtuous, learned, generous, wise,” one generates pride.

When, in a similar way to having conceit, one forms and clings to some view about virtue, learning, generosity, or wisdom, then one holds to a false view.

In immediate dependence on one’s accomplishment in faith, and the other [virtues], each one of these qualities [of faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom] becomes the causal condition for greed when one feels pleased with oneself, the causal condition for hatred when one feels contempt for others, the causal condition for the delusion that is associated with both of these, and the causal condition for conceit and views in the manner stated; in immediate

⁷⁴ *Tattha kusalā ti kusala, dhammārammā. Kusala, saddo c’ettha [Bāhitikasutte* viya] anavajj’atthe daṭṭhabbo. Kasmā pan’ettha taṇhā kusala, pariyāyena uddhaṭṭā? Heṭṭhā desanāhāre vipallāsa, hetu, bhāvena taṇhaṃ uddharitvā tassā vasena saṅkilesa, pakkho dassito. Vicitta, paṭibhānatāya pana idhā’pi taṇhā, mukhen’eva vodāna, pakkharā dassetuṃ kusala, pariyāyena taṇhā uddhaṭṭā. [*Bāhitika Sutta, M 88/2:112-116.]*

⁷⁵ *Saddhaṃ upanissāya mānaṃ jappeti, diṭṭhiṃ gaṇhāti. Sīlaṃ ... pe ... sutarā ... pe ... cāgaṃ ... pe ... paññaṃ upanissāya mānaṃ jappeti, diṭṭhiṃ gaṇhāti. Saddhā ... sīlaṃ ... sutarā ... cāgo ... paññaṃ rāgassa ... dosassa mohassa mānassa diṭṭhiyā patthanāya upanissaya, paccayena paccayo.*

dependence on accomplishment in faith [each quality] becomes a condition of immediate support for the desire for existence and wealth.

Only the ordinary wholesome qualities are indicated here. The transcendent [wholesome qualities], however—which are pure, sublime, ultimate, and destroy the unwholesome, and therefore, like the moon in respect to the places of darkness, not a support for the unwholesome—are not included here. (PaṭA:Be 443 f)

2.2.2.4 What the commentary explains here is that the same lack of investigation (*anupaparikkhā*) that we have seen above attributed to those who hold false views is here attributed to Buddhists who take pride in and become attached to what their Buddhist teachers teach. It is noteworthy that in the course of commenting on the Atthasālinī’s question about the “faith” of those of wrong view, the 6th and 7th century subcommentaries of Ānanda and of Dhammapāla take “lack of investigation” as meaning “delusion” (*moha*), explaining that “[a kind of] reverential commitment to something undeserving [groundless] (*avatthu*) can arise by way of delusion or by way of [false] view.” (DhsMṬ:Be 120)

In the present context, namely, lack of investigation with regard to what Buddhist teachers teach, presumably what we have is a case of “reverential commitment”—as distinct from true faith—to something deserving.⁷⁶ Thus ordinary Buddhists are always in danger of becoming proud in their spiritual attainments, of thinking that such attainments make them better than others. It is only when they come to the very end of the spiritual path that they let go of such pride and attachment: the good qualities (including faith) associated with the transcendent (*lok’uttara*) consciousness that constitutes the moment of awakening cut off such pride and attachment.

2.2.3 The common faith

2.2.3.1 Insofar as early Buddhism speaks of Buddhist training and progress as being **experiential and empirical**—our experiences are either sense-based or mind-made—we may learn something useful from a comparison of them with the scientific method. Science basically measures things through careful observation, experimentation and deduction. However, the Buddhist method of truth verification is not only through personal observation but through personal experience. While science is based on a “neutral” 2nd person or 3rd person observation, the Buddhist experience is always one of a direct experience; we are transformed by that experience, awakened by it.

Science measures things; only the measurable can be used or makes sense in science. Buddhist philosophy and meditation must reach some level of “**immeasurability**” (*appamañña*) in order to be authentic. Basically, this idea of immeasurability refers to the breakdown of all barriers of “self” and “other”: there is only the experience without anyone experiencing it. This advanced level of non-self experience is sometimes termed “non-that-ness” (*atammayatā*).⁷⁷

Now, how do we apply this teaching to the nature of **faith**, that is, to cognitive faith and affective faith? [2.1.2]. While cognitive faith is sense-based—rooted in the “seen, heard, sensed, known”—and thus directed to external objects, affective faith arises from a direct, intuitive experience of true reality of the here and now.

⁷⁶ Dhammapāla’s Subcomy (*anuṭṭikā*) elaborates: “Lack of investigation is delusion. But the delusion in this case should be understood as being dissociated from [false] views. But because a view is something that conforms to [the delusion] with which it is associated, it is precisely by holding to that [view] that others hold on to. *Something inappropriate*: something that one should not have faith in. *Reverential commitment*: the commentator states how it seems like faith to those who are deluded or hold false views’ (DhsAṬ:Be 126).

⁷⁷ See **Atam,maya S** (A 6.104), SD 19.13(2.4); **Atam,mayatā**, SD 19.13.

What is the significance of this in the experience of religious dual belonging? Before we can answer this question, we need to have some idea of possibilities of such a dual belonging.

2.2.3.2 Hypothetically, there are 3 possibilities:⁷⁸

Firstly, a person may wish to belong to two faiths in order to reconcile conflicting areas of his or her life. Often this kind of dual belonging is pragmatic. We can call this first group **the Blenders**,⁷⁹ since they are eclectic syncretists, who consciously try to wrap their arms around both Buddhism and Christianity, thus creating a hybrid religion of sorts.

Such individuals may call themselves Buddhist-Christians or Christian-Buddhists, believing that, in spite of contradictions and tensions that exist between the religions, their spiritual experience is best explained or best advanced by embracing them both side by side, or some hybridization of the two. Finding common ground with parents, or a partner, or reconciling one's adoptive culture with one's past may give reason to discover commonalities and smooth over discordances. This process might well involve multiple religious communities,⁸⁰ but does not necessarily lead to the achievement of a more doctrinally consistent position.

2.2.3.3 Religious blending is especially common amongst **the traditional Chinese**, even the Buddhists. They are likely to keep to Confucianist ethics of loyalty and priority for family members and relations, respect for elders and those in power, and even to the extent of saying the "Chinese yes" to what they actually disagree with for the sake of social harmony. They are very likely to see their fortune or misfortune in a Daoist way of "luck" or the intervention of some external force, whether demonic or ancestral, and practice luck-promoting rituals or gestures. Otherwise, they show respect, at least nominally, to Buddhist beliefs and practices. In short, as a rule, "Chineseness," openly or subtly comes first and foremost.⁸¹

2.2.3.4 Religion in **modern Japan** is very much a secular phenomenon, being practised only on occasions of religious festivals or as some life passage rites. Japanese religion is primarily manifested in Shinto and Buddhism, the two faiths often practised simultaneously. Affiliation to any religion is often an alien notion, except in the case of the "new religions" that arose following the 2nd World War. Even then, such a membership is more of a social networking than traditional religious living.

The birth of a new baby is celebrated with a formal shrine or temple visit at the age of about one month, as are the third, fifth, and seventh birthdays (*shichi-go-san*), and the official beginning of adulthood at age 20 (*seijin shiki*). The vast majority of Japanese wedding ceremonies have been Christian since the mid-1990s. Shinto weddings and secular weddings that follow a "Western-style" format are also popular⁸² but much less so and a small fraction (usually less than one percent) of weddings are Buddhist.⁸³

⁷⁸ This subsection is based on Caroline Brazier, "Dual belonging and Pure Land Buddhism," in D'Costa & Thompson, *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging*, Routledge, 2016:197 f.

⁷⁹ "The blenders," "the borrowers" and "the inspired" are from Tim Geoffrion, "How do Christianity and Buddhism mix?" 2012.

⁸⁰ Such as that described by Catherine Cornille, "Strategies of negotiation in Buddhist-Christian dual belonging," in (edd) D'Costa & Thompson, *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging*, Routledge, 2016:143-158.

⁸¹ On the ancient roots of Chinese eclecticism, see **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.2 (2.2.3, 2.4).

⁸² Matt Jenkins of UK informs me: "I have been to a few 'humanist' weddings in the UK, and it has always struck me how they have struggled against the traditional wedding format—they still have exchanging of vows, something resembling a sermon, songs in place of hymns. Culturally we have an idea of what a 'wedding' looks like, and so a ceremony doesn't feel 'right' unless it looks something like it." (7 May 2025). Like UK, Singapore and Malaysia have fully civil ceremonies performed by a secular marriage registrar. Then we have the "traditional" ceremonies

Japanese funerals are usually performed by Buddhist priests, and Buddhist rites are also common on death day anniversaries of deceased family members. Over 90% of Japanese funerals take place according to Buddhist traditions. The funeral proper, called *kokubetsu-shiki* (告別式), is usually on the day after the wake. The procedure is similar to the wake, and incense is offered while a priest chants a sutra. The ceremony differs slightly as the deceased receives a new Buddhist name (戒名, *kaimyō*; lit, “precept name”) written in Kanji. The name is to prevent the return of the deceased if their name is called.⁸⁴

2.2.3.5 Secondly, there are **the Borrowers**. Many Christians in the West have been exposed to Eastern thought through the media and popular literature, and wind up mixing and matching various beliefs, whether or not they realize they are doing so. Such a person may want to live in the borderlands, fully committed to neither position, a maverick within each.

This duality provides grounds from which to critique and challenge religion. This can be fruitful as a contemporary response to a world in which global communication and rich diversity of cultural alternatives undercuts any way or idea that claim to be uniquely right. At best this position produces a creative tension between worlds to light up the dark corners of any tradition to reveal new angles; at worst, it leads to a cat and-mouse game of skepticism or of circling groundlessness which never commits to anything but its own constant reinvention.

In our time, dominant Christians often fear any challenge from Buddhism. When they feel threatened in their unalterable Christian world-view or faith, they freely conscript from Buddhism whatever they think might helpfully prop up their theologies. The average Christian faithful is likely to embrace various Buddhist insights (eg, the practice of letting go to reduce suffering in human lives), or adopt helpful practices (eg, meditation) as “add-ons” to their faith and spirituality. Often such borrowing is done without any rigorous intellectual theological reflection, and thus Borrowers are often unconscious syncretists. (Post-modern scholars generally argue that all religious people, including Christians, are syncretistic. They just aren’t sure about it.)

2.2.3.6 Thirdly, there are **the Inspired**, those for whom an encounter with Buddhism or another religion becomes a catalyst to look more deeply into their own faith tradition. They are inspired to see if they have missed something that may have always been there but has been lacking in their experience. Such a person may find complementarity between the two faiths in which elements from each throw light on a greater whole.

Spiritual growth for the Inspired, stemming from the encounter with Buddhism, will still look, sound, and be very Christian, in the best sense of the term. Yet, at the same time, if you listen carefully, you will notice that the Inspired develop a larger, more inclusive worldview. They tend to be more compassionate, sympathetic, and understanding.

They care less about adherence to rules and traditions, and more about being “the real deal,” that is, to genuinely love God and wish to walk humbly with their God as true servants of Christ. Similarly, they joyfully take the 3 jewels as their refuge, yet accept Christians (or those of other religions) just as they are, participating in their religious activities but always keeping in mind the 3 jewels.

Each faith offers a perspective. These may be seen as different roads up the mountain, or different parts of the elephant, to use two well-worn metaphors. A Christian, for example, may learn Buddhist

according to the ethnic background. Where Christianity is dominant, and people want a non-religious wedding or want to assert their lack of religion, they often end up with something which mimics a “Christian” wedding. The Christians themselves only gradually began officiating in marriages after the 8th cent.

⁸³ J R LeFebvre, “Christian wedding ceremonies: “Nonreligiousness” in Contemporary Japan,” *Japanese J of Religion and Culture* 42,2, 2015:185-203.

⁸⁴ B Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, Princeton, 1991:191-208 (193); D R Williams, *The Other Side of Zen*, Princeton, 2005:38-58.

meditation to develop inner calm so that the voice of the (Christian) God can be better heard. A Buddhist enjoys Christian fellowship and uses the joy to cultivate calmness and clarity to reflect on impermanence and cultivate insight.

2.2.3.7 As we can see from this example, the integration of two faiths need not be made on an equal footing. A person may stay broadly rooted in one tradition but draw on features of another to deepen their insight. Thus in Caroline Brazier's own work as a psychotherapist, she works from a basically a Buddhist model, but has no difficulty in integrating Western psychodynamic or behavioural concepts into her practice where these offer ways to expand and deepen her work. The integrating frame is provided by the core model, and other concepts are added, often stripped of their accompanying context.

Sometimes, too, despite achieving a deep understanding and appreciation of another religious framework, a person may conclude their studies feeling confirmed in their own position. For example, in encountering Pure Land, though he reached a deep appreciation of the insight of its founder, Shinran, Karl Barth⁸⁵ ultimately confirmed his own view that Christianity was the only true path. An informed Buddhist easily accepts other Christians respecting their beliefs and practices, knowing fully well we are all conditioned by our childhood, schooling and society. No one has seen God, and the Buddhists are not awakened; to that extent, we are walking the same or parallel paths, as it were, moving forward together in life.

2.2.4 Dual attachment⁸⁶

2.2.4.1 We will here explore and articulate a way of thinking expressed in the suttas that might be used at least to make Buddhist sense of certain kinds of Buddhist-Christian dual belonging. It is a way of thinking that ultimately sees dual belonging as a dual attachment, which like all attachments must ultimately be given up. While this way of thinking is clearly not the only response to issues of religious diversity found in the Buddhist tradition, it does seem to be a significant and important one. It is a way of thinking that manifests in various places and in various forms in the history of Buddhist thought.

Buddhists' faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha can effectively turn into an unwholesome (unbuddhist) attachment that manifests as conceit and pride, and an opinionatedness about the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha which causes unwholesome actions and words. Nonetheless such attachment may have a role to play in encouraging wholesome acts and words. But ultimately, like all attachments, it is to be given up for the Buddhist goal of complete liberation.

Christianity and other religions are not so different. From the Buddhist perspective outlined above, Christian faith should not condone conceit and pride in one's Christianity, or an attachment to and opinionatedness about the articles of Christian faith; it should encourage wholesome acts and words. Such selfless acts serve as windows into the liberating vision of nonself or true "self-emptying," if the final goal is true salvation.

2.2.4.2 God-believers often piously claim that they believe in the "same" God. Yet they swear at each other in the name of that "same" God. History shows that they even go to war, killing millions of their own kind. God-believers keep trying to bridge this abysmal gap, but with each attempt another sect or denomination or "True Church" is born into the crowded God-believing family.

Perhaps we should understand and accept the fact that God-belief is a very personal idea and can never be theologized, churchified or systematized. God-belief is a matter of faith; faith is a special feeling

⁸⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, tr G T Thomson & H Knight, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-75 1-2: 342.

⁸⁶ See Gethin 2016:179, 194 f.

in a person, and differs from person to person; it can neither be measured or shared (if shared, it may only be “belief”).

Surely a light shines on the God-believers who meditate on the breath or radiate lovingkindness. These are practices any believer (or non-believer) can do. Properly done, the meditator feels peace and love. Whether we believe in God or not, however we believe in God, we can benefit from the cultivation of the heart that is meditation. The breath is the heart of life; lovingkindness is the heart God (*brahma*); when we breathe with love, we live God-like; it is called *brahma, vihara*.

2.2.4.3 From a broad perspective, dual belonging seems to be a kind of dual attachment—an attachment to the conventional religious forms and expressions of Buddhism and Christianity, which while offering a solution to our problems are at that same time part of the problem: part of what we need to be liberated from. As long as Christian faith constitutes at heart faith in the good and truth that the doctrines, symbols and institutions of Christianity stand for, then it can be considered “faith” in the sense found in Buddhism, too.

Or to put it another way, as long as an attachment to Christianity encourages and motivates one to do good deeds, to do the kind of things that leads one closer to nirvana, then it qualifies as what the Nettippakaraṇa would call “wholesome” craving: not absolutely wholesome, but a helpful attachment, a skillful means, that can be given up when the time comes. [2.2.2.1]

2.2.4.4 In articulating a religious understanding of the problem of conceit and pride in one’s religion, the Abhidharma traditions of Buddhist systematic thought are taking up a well-established Buddhist theme, one most famously expressed in the parable of the raft, found in **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22), where the Buddha declares:

I have shown you that **the Dharma** is comparable to a raft, which is *for crossing over* (the waters to the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping.

Bhikshus, having understood the parable of the raft, **you should abandon even the dharmas [the good], how much more so that which are not dharmas [the bad]**⁸⁷

(M 22,13 f/1:135), SD 3.13

2.2.4.5 That this is an understanding which privileges Buddhism’s own position must, of course, be acknowledged and is made explicit in **the Cūḷa Sihanāda Sutta** (M 11), in which the Buddha makes his “lion roar” (*sīha, nāda*): realised and awakened recluses are to be found *only* in his teaching; other systems are empty of such awakened recluses (M 11).⁸⁸

Its Sutta Commentary explains at length:

The traditions recorded by Buddhaghosa in his 5th-century commentary to this Sutta explain how these non-Buddhist traditions do not lead to a final release from the round of rebirth, but at best only to a temporary respite from the woes of the cycle of lives in the form of rebirth in a relatively pleasant realm: non-Buddhist brahmins are born in the Brahmā world, non-Buddhist ascetics among the gods of streaming radiance (*ābhassarā*), non-Buddhist wanderers among the gods of radiant glory (*subha, kinhā*), Ājīvikas among the infinite minded (*ānanta, mānasa*) or unconscious beings (MA 2:9 f).

These are the cosmological equivalents of various meditation attainments which, apart from the last, are recommended for Buddhist recluses, too. But since these are rebirths within the

⁸⁷ *Dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag’eva adhammā*. For comy, see SD 3.13 (3.3), esp (3.3.2).

⁸⁸ M 11/1:63-68 (SD 49.2).

samsaric round, they will eventually come to an end (and these celestial beings will “fall” into lower suffering states).

Buddhaghosa explains that faith in a religious tradition that does not lead to release from the round of rebirth is inappropriate because both the teacher and his followers will continue to be reborn, which will eventually have unfortunate consequences:

“In a religion that does not lead to release [from the round of rebirth], when the teacher dies he becomes a lion, a tiger, a bear, a leopard, a hyena, while his disciples become deer, boars and antelopes. He does not then feel patience, kindness, or mercy for them out of consideration for the fact that they were once his attendants and supporters. Rather he pounces on them and then drinks their blood and eats their fat and plump flesh.

Or the teacher becomes a cat, and the disciples become chickens or mice, then exactly as stated, showing no pity, he eats them. Or the teacher becomes a guardian in hell and the disciples become inhabitants of hell. He does not feel pity for them remembering that they were once his attendants and supporters, but inflicts various punishments on them, tying them to a burning wheel, making them climb a mountain of hot coals, throwing them into a metal pot, putting them through many painful ordeals.

Or perhaps when the disciples die they become the lions, and such like, and the teacher becomes a deer, or some other kind of animal. Then they do not feel patience, kindness, or mercy for him remembering that he was once their teacher whom they served with the 4 requisites [of clothing, alms, lodging and medicine]; rather they are the agents of his misery and misfortune exactly as stated.

In this way, faith in the teacher in a religion that does not lead to release is not appropriate: even when it lasts for some time, it eventually comes to nothing.” (MA 2:13 f)

2.2.4.6 The Buddha explains that there are 4 types of “grasping” (*upādāna*): to sense pleasures, to views, to rituals and vows, and to self-view. Some non-Buddhist ascetics may understand the first, second and third types of grasping, but never (significantly) the fourth. In such a tradition, faith in the teacher is not appropriate (*sammaggata*): the teaching and way of practice are badly explained, and do not lead to release.

The Buddha, on the other hand, understands all kinds of grasping, and in his teaching and way of practice faith in the teacher is fully appropriate: the teaching and way of practice are well explained, and lead to release. While denying that complete realization is found in other religious traditions, **the Cūḷa Sīhanāda Sutta** (M 11) allows for a partial realization in other traditions; non-Buddhist ascetics have real faith, but their faith is at least in part misplaced since it is directed towards a religious tradition that is wanting. [2.2.4.4]

2.2.5 Believing and doing

2.2.5.1 The Scottish philosopher **David Hume** at one point in his *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739), discusses the inconsistency between what people say they believe and what they must in their heart of hearts truly believe:

[A]nd 'tis with reason, that many eminent theologians have not scrupled to affirm, that tho' the vulgar have no formal principles of infidelity, yet they are really infidels in their hearts, and have nothing like what we can call a belief of the eternal duration of their souls. ... I ask, if these peo-

ple really believe what is inculcated on them, and what they pretend to affirm; and the answer is obviously in the negative.⁸⁹ (1793 1.3.9)

[Paraphrase: “We can reasonably say that many well known religious people are not honest enough to admit they lack faith. Yet they are really faithless at heart. They show nothing to reflect that they believe in such an immortal soul. Let me ask: Are these people true to what they want us to think of them, and what they pretend to believe, the answer is clearly no.”]

The answer is obviously in the negative because, Hume observes, their behaviour in other respects reveals “that they really do not believe what they affirm” (115). Hume’s observations point towards the fact that we may not always consciously be aware of what we believe or do not believe. Hume’s example concerns those who claim formally to hold certain beliefs but whose behaviour indicates otherwise.

2.2.5.2 But we can turn this around. We may claim, for example, that we do not believe that there is any point in giving, or that deeds have consequences; or we may not be consciously concerned at all with whether we believe or do not believe in such things; and yet in both cases our behaviour (being wholesome) might reveal that deep in our hearts we do.

A friend once told me, “I’m bad Buddhist!” I replied, “You must be right for thinking so. Imagine if good Buddhist said, ‘I’m a good Buddhist!’?” I don’t think I’m even a Buddhist and that’s good enough to begin with.

2.2.6 What we believe, what we really are

2.2.6.1 Gethin closes his insightful paper, “The Buddhist faith of non-Buddhists” (2016), with an astute observation. European traditions of thought may be used to thinking of emotions or affective conditions as short-lived passing mental states, yet seem disinclined to think of conditions that are conceived as cognitive in nature—such as views, opinions and faith—as existing in this manner.⁹⁰

Yet Buddhist Abhidharma wants to treat all mental states as similar in this respect: faith, wrong view, right view and so on are all equally and finally understood as short-lived mental episodes or events. Thus it is not so much a question of some non-Buddhists qualifying, as it were, as “anonymous Buddhists” while others do not, but of all non-Buddhists sometimes qualifying as “anonymous Buddhists,” and all Buddhists sometimes qualifying as “anonymous non-Buddhists”: sometimes Buddhists cannot help but be non-Buddhists and non-Buddhists cannot help but be Buddhists.

2.2.6.2 Put another way, non-Buddhists sometimes have Buddhist mental episodes and Buddhists sometimes have non-Buddhist episodes. Put yet another way, being a Buddhist or not is not finally the question: the question is what sorts of mental episodes occur, those motivated by *greed, hatred and delusion* or those motivated by *generosity, kindness and understanding*. It is not who or what we consciously like to think we are—Buddhist or non-Buddhist—that is important, but the underlying motivations of our acts, words and thoughts. In short, **what matters is not what we believe, but how we behave.** (Gethin 2016:192; emphases added.)

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⁸⁹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed I A Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. with text revised and variant readings, P H Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978 1.3.9,13 (113 f).

⁹⁰ For further consideration of “faith” by way of the distinction between “cognitive” and “affective,” see Gethin, *Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:106-116; for a discussion of the Buddhist understanding of *ditṭhi*; see Gethin, “Wrong view (*micchā-ditṭhi*) and right view (*sammā-ditṭhi*) in the Theravāda Abhidhamma,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 5 2004:15-28.