

Natural adaptation

The Buddha teaches us to be truly free
[Previously published as fb210715 Piya Tan]

No one, no religion, owns any words or language. The word God, for example, is used in all God-religions, and it has differing, even contradicting, meanings. In fact, God-followers even go to war against other God believers, such as in the 30 Years War (1618-1648) in Europe, which killed between 4.5-8 million people!

Religions that arose in the same country or region often used the vocabulary of other local religions out of convenience, and also to neutralize their influence from those external religions. In fact, followers from other religions, from brahmins to the Candalas (lowest caste members), often visit the Buddha to ask him questions him about religion.

Buddha teaches only Dhamma

Understandably, such non-Buddhists would use their own religious terms. The Buddha carefully listens to them and uses those very same terms to give a better explanation and alternative to live the true holy life. I have used the term NATURAL ADAPTATION in my translation work for this remarkable skill of the Buddha in answering the challenges from other religions.

Just because the Buddha uses Vedic terms does not mean that he is teaching Vedism. Just the opposite, he is purifying those terms of their Vedic and Brahminical senses, and giving them better new senses which ANYONE can follow.

We are Buddhists

When non-Buddhists try to confuse us by saying that the Buddha actually taught Vedism or Brahmanism or Hinduism, just smile, and say: We are BUDDHISTS and we don't believe that. You are not Buddhists, believe what you like!

A famous example is the word BRAHMA, which originally refers to the highest God in Brahmanism in ancient times. In fact, Brahma himself, in his past life, listened to the past Buddha Kassapa, and became a non-returner. Reborn as Maha Brahma, he continued to be devoted to the Buddha Gotama, and even invited him to teach Dhamma for our benefit.

Godliness within

Brahma is so Buddhist that the impious Brahmins rejected him, and demoted from their pantheon! Today, there are hardly a dozen temples to Brahma in India, but thousands of temples to Siva and other gods.

Moreover, the Buddha uses the term BRAHMA,VIHĀRA, the way Brahma lives, to mean Godliness, that is, love, compassion, joy and peace (represented by his 4 "faces"). These, to the Buddha, are the 4 divine abodes (*brahma,vihāra*), which we can cultivate, so that we all have Brahma qualities or Godliness within us. Better than worshipping God is to cultivate

the wholesome virtues that define a good God! After all, we are all part of the rebirth cycle: why not cultivate the Brahma qualities now and live wisely and happily even as humans.

Goodness within

In **the Vatthûpama Sutta** (M 7, SD 28.12), the parable of the cloth, the Buddha declares that no one can wash away their sins, evil or bad karma, even in the most holy of rivers. (If this were possible, then, the fishes and turtles would be pure, or these washers would be reborn as fishes and turtles!). The Buddha speaks of the “inner baptism,” the purification of the mind and heart.

At the end of the Sutta, the Buddha teaches:

For the pure, it is always a holy day!
For the pure, it is always a precept day!
For the pure, whose deeds are pure,
his vow is always fulfilled.

Wash right here, brahmin!
Towards all beings give safety.
If you speak no falsehood,
if you harm no life,

If you do not take the not-given,
Faithful, free from selfishness—
What need is there to go to Gayā [the holy place]?
Any well is Gayā to you!

The true brahmin

The Buddha also declares that no man is born pure or impure. Even if one is born into a brahmin family, when he does evil, karma will follow him, like anyone else. Those who look down on others are false brahmins. The Buddha declares that the true brahmin is THE ARHAT, one who has awakened to true reality, free from suffering and rebirth; see Dhammapada chapter 26.

When we follow the Buddha’s teaching, keeping the precepts, calming and clearing our mind, gaining true understanding about the mind, then, we also feel JOYFUL. From this joy comes the courage to speak the TRUTH, to free our community from fear and oppression.

We are free!

We are born free. Society and religion put us in the chains of caste and power politics. If we do not stand for our own FREEDOM, then we have none.

When we do not stand up for what the Buddha teaches, then, we hear only the voices of those who reject or demean the Buddha; those who enslave our minds with their false teachings and foreign ways.

We deserve the Buddhism we get: we deserve the true teaching of the Buddha. We must stand up for the Buddha Dhamma, and only then we will benefit from it, our community will benefit from it. We will then be truly FREE.

R787 Revisioning Buddhism 332

[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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