

佛學問答

Questions on Buddhism

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Q. The attainment of a Buddhist practitioner is sometimes good and sometimes bad. A common practitioner can not maintain his attainment always in its high altitude. Why the attainment of his after birth is determined by his one thought on his death?

A. The one thought on one's death will determine to what path one will be reborn. It will not determine the attainment after his rebirth.

Q. "Concentration of mind", "Continuing purified thought" and "Clear mind" are these terms express the same thing?

A. "Concentration of mind" expresses the state of a short interval. Continuing purified thought expresses the continuous state of mind. "Clear mind" expresses the mind resisting the light winds of interference.

Q. Humans and animals are viviparous. How about the birth of Devas, Asuras, demons and hell beings? Are Arhans and Bodhisattvas born by transformation?

A. The Devas and hell beings are born by transformation. The demons are born by viviparous and transformation. Human beings are commonly viviparous. But sometimes they are of other forms of birth and it is very rare. The Arhans and Bodhisattvas have no birth. But for saving the world they are sometimes born by transformation.

Q. I was told that one day practicing in this world is better than one hundred year practicing in the Pure Land. Is the reason for that like those practicing in a busy market for a short time to be much better than practicing in the deep mountains or other quiet places for a long time?

A. It is so. But the practice should be

earnest and benefitting to others. Because it is difficult to practice in a busy market therefore you get better attainment. And there are much more people to be saved in a busy market; you can save more and it will be better.

Q. There are many Buddhists who repeat the name of Amitabha everyday. When they are going to die, how will Buddha Amitabha know and receive them to the Pure Land?

A. Amitabha has inconceivable boundless supernatural powers like telephone exchange which can response to many subscribers at the same time as they want to call. Amitabha's numerous lights shine to the worlds in all directions. There are also numerous transformed Buddhas in the lights. There are Buddhas to be seen by every Buddhist like the moon with its image in numerous waters.

Q. What is the difference between the fact and the reason of repeating Amitabha?

A. The fact of repeating Amitabha is to believe in the Western Pure Land ten trillion worlds apart, in the Amitabha and in the paradise; and to repeat the name to expect to go. The reason of repeating Amitabha is to understand that the Mind is the Buddha, that the Pure Land is made by our mind and that the mind and the event are the same. But the best is to perform in these two respects and not to go to one extreme.

Q. I have heard that there are guardian Devas for one who has taken the five precepts. Are these Devas belong to the three fold division or beyond it?

A. It is stated in the Liting Sutra that those who keep the five precepts were guarded by good Devas sent by the God to obey the order of the Buddha. From this it will be Devas inside the three fold division.

佛學論文

TOPICS ON BUDDHISM

WHY I EMBRACED THE BUDDHIST FAITH

by

Rev. James E. Wagner

On a great many occasions in recent years I have been asked what it was that made me

decide to embrace the Buddhist doctrine as my faith. Such a question is always difficult to answer for it involves not only an approach by logic but also by emotion. To divorce one from the other is inconceivable, yet it is this very union of emotion and logic which makes the reason "why" so difficult to explain. For most of you, perhaps, who will either hear or read this, the choice of whether or not to be a Buddhist has never had to be faced. Most Buddhists of Asian origin seem to impress me as being Buddhists largely because it is the family faith, rather than from any real conviction of its worth.

However, for those of us born and reared in the Christian faith and culture, a goodly amount of soul searching, mental debate, and evaluation takes place if we consider changing our religion. Ordinarily there is a good deal of family pressure exerted and the danger of being over-emotional about it is always present. But once these two factors have been faced and dealt with the foundation stone of all Christian belief, the idea of an all-knowing omnipotent God, has to be met. From our earliest years we are told of the great love God has for all of us earth-bound creatures and of the terrible punishments of hell if we fail to love him to the total exclusion of all else. So to leave Christianity involves a certain amount of readjusting of our conditioned beliefs and emotional ties.

In my own life a long and continued series of illnesses during my early childhood convinced me of the gross inconsistencies of this doctrine of an all-loving and all-knowing God. This and the rank injustices in the lives of many people, who allegedly are equally loved by God, served to convince me that the conventional belief in the existence of this God was open to serious doubt. The basic trinity of 1.) God as the father, 2.) the Holy Ghost or Spirit, and 3.) his son, Jesus the Christ, rapidly falls apart in the light of this and the lack of any actual proof that Christ ever existed. To try to divide one's emotion and logic on this point alone is extremely difficult, for the heart and the head must work in a compossible unison if one is to be a well-balanced individual.

To conduct a search for this God, or even for some evidence of his existence, is apt to

lead to some evasion and confusion. The Christian minister's stock reply to such questions is that we are being blasphemous by asking such questions, for God, to him, is everywhere. If we pursue the topic, the minister is apt to point to a tree or a flower and state that because the mystery of life and creation is beyond the capacity of man to imitate or understand, the very existence of such objects of nature is itself proof of God's existence. But such reasoning is based almost entirely upon emotion and what one desires to believe, and the conclusions are not reached through scrutinizing intellection. What they are really saying is that man in his ignorance, when faced with the fact of nature's phenomena, assumes that its existence is all that is needed in the way of decisive proof.

Such reasoning as this, coupled with a sizable amount of corruption and hypocrisy in the church I had been attending, made me finally decide to leave Christianity and to cease attempting to believe in doctrines which, to me, were based on sandy foundations. At first it was not an easy decision to do this. But as time passed by and I recoiled from these attempts, I found that I had begun to formulate a system of ethics, morals, and a limited metaphysics by which I could live my life. I can't and won't pretend I had answered all the questions which troubled me. But I could no longer confuse man's ignorance with divinity either. It was clear enough to me that life presented sufficient problems which could be solved by any thinking person possessing some moral and ethical system, without becoming involved in the matter of divinity.

Then in 1948 I was fortunate in meeting several Japanese families who professed a belief in the Buddhist faith. At this time, the word "Buddhism" meant little more to me than a system of idol worshipping. But I was interested in learning whatever of it I could in order to better understand my new friends. I must confess my great surprise and pleasure in learning that Buddhism not only had within it a magnificent system of ethics and logic, but also that one could delve as deeply into its philosophy as one's intellectual capacities would permit. It was a further source

of pleasure for me to learn that so many of the conclusions at which I had arrived after leaving the Christian church were also found in the Buddhist writings and carried to far greater lengths.

Now, as far as the system of Buddhist morality is concerned, it is largely the same as that outlined in Christianity's ten commandments. Not one of the great religions ever invented morality; it is found in thinking peoples everywhere, including many tribes of savages living in the jungles. The distinguishing reason, as far as I understood it, for being moral in Christianity was that if I was not moral, I was to be forever condemned to the tortures of a fiery hell. In Buddhism, however, morality was not based upon a fear of punishment, but upon a system of irrefutable logic which could be tested in every man's life.

There is a striking similarity between the negativism of Christianity's moral vows and those of Hinayana Buddhism's moral vows. In the former, one is admonished to adhere to the ten commandments beginning with "Thou shalt not." And in the latter the devotee also vows to abstain from a certain number of activities. Now all these abstentions are purely negative, and for a certain type of individual, refraining from these activities is sufficient to completely satisfy his moral conscience. However, for the person who is sufficiently developed mentally and spiritually to be dissatisfied with a mere not doing, the Mahayana school of Buddhism recognizes not only the abstentions, but has also insisted that refraining from doing bad is not enough. For every vow the Mahayana devotee takes dealing with abstentions, he must also take one for the purpose of doing good. With my inherent leanings towards idealism and humanitarism this latter had, and still has, a very strong appeal. It supplies the factor which makes Buddhism dynamic instead of static.

Another thing which always annoyed me in the West was the idea that each religious group alone has ALL there was to have of truth neatly wrapped up in a little box and labeled with the name of the religion promoting it. To an uncomfortable degree this situation also exists here in the East. But in

Western Buddhism the concept of having the sole possession of truth is largely missing. The doctrines which the Buddha taught recognizes two aspects of truth, relative and absolute. Relative truth for every man will not be identical for all individuals because of the differences in understanding capacities. And absolute truth is above the debasing arguments of petty, sectarian squabbles. In Buddhism there are sufficient shallows and depths to satisfy every type of emotion and intellect, if only one takes the trouble to look.

One of the fundamental differences of the utmost importance to the sincere Buddhist thinker is the unlimited degree of freedom of thought allowed him. In Christianity a number of dogmatic beliefs MUST be accepted from the very first, or else one is considered to be a rebellious heretic. In Buddhism on the other hand, one is repeatedly instructed to accept nothing on blind belief. Even the most basic of the Buddhist doctrines are to be thoroughly examined and tested before being accepted. And a man does not lose his good standing as a Buddhist if, in good conscience, he cannot accept certain parts of the teachings. It is believed that he is just not yet ready for that particular aspect of the doctrine. Now, such broadness of mind demonstrating the intelligent approach to all doctrinal assertions strikes me as being decidedly logical.

The questioning mind is welcomed in the Buddhist faith by all the more enlightened personages. For the attainment of enlightenment is approached through understanding. And understanding is derived only by examining all facets of the doctrine and then drawing carefully reasoned conclusions from the evidence obtained. Never at any time is the possessor of the inquisitive mind made to feel guilty or sinful for his probing. But in the religion I discarded I was often told pointedly and rudely that my presumptuousness in questioning what is currently called "God's will" could only lead such a sinful one as myself to the very depths of hell's fire. The pointing finger of accusation was pointed at me so often that I finally became disgusted with the false, pompous piety I observed in my own church.

I wish to stress at this point that I am not throwing stones at another faith, nor do

I bear any animosity towards the Christian religion. But I can't deny the happenings which occurred nor my conclusions drawn from them. I regret, sincerely, that I cannot give a more flattering report of the church of my family's faith. There are many wonderful and sincere Christians in the world today who are a credit to themselves, their community, and to religions in general. And there are many persons whose basic natures, emotions, and intellectual make-up find that, for them, Christianity satisfies their spiritual side much better than all other existing religions. I am sincerely happy that the Christian religion exists and is available for these people.

Perhaps the most powerful incentive of all which caused me to come to Buddhism was the phenomenon of retrocognition. From my earliest years I have had a decided, distinct, and unfailing memory of having existed on this earth before, and as a member of another race. Admittedly, my remembrance does not span a great section of this former life, but it does cover enough of it to convince me of its conclusive reality. In my former religion no allowances were made for such things, and the few times I mention it I was subjected to considerable ridicule.

In the Buddhist doctrines rebirth is found to be an integral part of Lord Buddha's teachings. Without it the apparent injustices in the world would be truly appalling. The teaching of rebirth along with its sister teaching, that of the Law of Karma, shows that life itself is the great equalizer. The forces of evil actions committed by any individual and released in the world will inevitably return to the doer with the same amount of force with which they were released. In the light of my own experiences, and the conclusions I derived from them, the acceptance of a creed in which these threads of truth were woven as integral parts was easy to embrace.

In an earlier portion of this talk I mentioned my having strong leanings toward humanitarianism. And this part of my nature received an especial joy in the Buddhist religion's attitude toward animals. In all religions worthy of the name the concept of fostering love for one another has been proclaimed. But only in the teachings of the

Buddha has love been extended to the degree of covering all sentient life. In the Western world today the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the S. P. C. A., will find that its most remote ancestor was born during the reign of Emperor Asoka (274-232 B. C.,) when he caused to be erected throughout his kingdom free hospitals for both men and animals.

In the ten years since my introduction to Buddhism I have been increasingly grateful to all the individuals who have helped me to learn more of the teachings. I am inclined to think that one aspect of Buddhism, the meditation aspect, has probably helped me more than any other. For through the practice of meditation I have been able to experience glimpses, even though brief ones of the higher reality. And meditation has taught what all great teachers and philosophers know, that is, that the key to true happiness, that happiness which transcends all the trivialities of mundane living, is not something external. On the contrary it is buried deeply within us and can be exhumed and put to use only through the practice of frequent and periodic meditation. The kingdom of heaven is truly within us.

The forgoing reasons are the principle ones which caused me to tread the path leading to Buddhism. They are largely the same ones all Westerners have when they turn to the Buddhist doctrines. I am very glad that I have had the opportunity to examine the reasons for my being what I am. I have never been sorry, even for a moment, that I became a Buddhist. I only hope that my telling you of some of the reasons for my decision will make each of you pause and examine your own lives to discover the real reasons you, too, are Buddhists.

May the peaceful blessings of love and understanding engulf you in all your aspirations. May the Lord Buddha's teachings lead and guide you all your lives, and may an early enlightenment be yours.

