

## THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE TO OTHER RELIGIONS

The most important feature which distinguishes the Buddhist attitude to other religions is its tolerance of others' ideas. On this aspect Ven. Walpola Rahula makes the following observations in his much-translated book *What the Buddha Taught*:

"The spirit of tolerance and understanding has been from the beginning one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilization. That is why there is not a single example of persecution or the shedding of a drop of blood in converting people to Buddhism or in its propagation during its long history of 2500 years. It spread peacefully all over the continent of Asia.... Violence in any form, under any pretext whatsoever, is absolutely against the teaching of the Buddha."<sup>1</sup>

We find concrete historical evidence of this tolerant attitude translated into action in Rock Edict No. XII of Asoka, the great Buddhist Emperor of India in the third century B.C. He inscribed:

"One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honour others' religions too. So doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and render service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one depraves one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honours his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking, 'I will glorify my own religion.' But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely. So concord is good. Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ven. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*. Bedford, (1959) p. 5.

2. *ibid.* p. 4.

Buddhism spread steadily among neighbouring nations, and continues to do so even today, propelled by an inner dynamism which may be called the power of the veracity of its teaching and its commitment to non-violence. Wherever Buddhism spread it adapted itself to suit the cultural background of the country concerned. This is not because it did not have a new message to offer or a positive contribution to make, but because it had a total vision of reality.<sup>3</sup> It explained to man his situation in the world at large from the *lokiya*, *samparayika* and the *lokuttara* dimensions. The *lokiya* dimension dealt with the mundane situation in this tangible world of sense experience. The *samparayika* dimension dealt with the eschatological situation - how to make life happy in the world beyond the grave. The *lokuttara* dimension dealt with the ultimate bliss of emancipation, with a clear-cut path to its attainment.

It is possible to make this point clearer by citing the traditional episode of the blind men and the elephant.<sup>4</sup> When asked to describe the elephant, each blind man expressed his own idea of what the elephant looked like from the point of his own experience. The one who felt the side said the elephant was like a wall. The one who felt the tail said it was like a broom, and so forth. Now Buddhism is like the man with sight who gets a full view of the elephant. Therefore Buddhism realises that the broom-like part also has a legitimate place in the elephant and that the blind man has made the mistake of taking the part for the whole. So Buddhism would not get into arguments with the blind man for describing the elephant as a broom, but would rather find ways and means of curing the blindness, so that he too gets a full view of the elephant. This is how Buddhism has been a tolerant religion. It conceded to each philosophy the part of reality which each philosophy correctly described.

But this attitude did not prevent Buddhism from asserting itself whenever a false view, which was detrimental to man's well being, was upheld. As an example we can take the caste

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3. K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London (1963) p. 379, 418.

4. *ibid.*

system that was prevalent in India during the time of the Buddha. Caste discrimination was an unhealthy social phenomenon that was supported by the Brahmanic philosophy. It denied human rights to a section of society, while giving undue privileges to another section. In the name of tolerance Buddhism did not abstain from criticizing this unhealthy social institution. Buddhism put forward various arguments<sup>5</sup> against discrimination on grounds of caste and maintained the position that a man's superiority or inferiority depended not on birth but on ethical grounds, on the quality of his own actions.

As another example can be cited the Buddhist attitude to *udakasuddhi*, or the efficacy of water for spiritual cleansing.<sup>6</sup> As this was not only a useless notion but also a dangerous one, Buddhism derided the idea by saying that, if it were true, all the aquatic creatures would ascend to heaven before all others, as they constantly live in water and had a better chance of getting their sins washed off. Thus, though tolerant, Buddhism was not afraid to call a spade a spade whenever the occasion demanded.

Buddhism is a non-dogmatic religion; it discouraged and even shunned debates. There are several *suttas* in the *Suttanipāta*<sup>7</sup> which clearly illustrate the Buddhist repugnance to debates. This standpoint is supported by several reasons. Buddhism delegated only limited validity to reason, as it was no sufficient criterion of truth.<sup>8</sup> Logical probability and psychological truths are of a different order.

Experiential truths propounded by Buddhism go far beyond the bounds of reason.<sup>9</sup> No account of rational arguments can prove even the taste of a mango; how much more the spiritual

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5. *Majjhimanikāya* ii. 147-157; *Suttanipāta* p. 115-123.

6. *Therīgāthā* 236-251.

7. *Suttanipāta* 780, 800; Jayatilleke *ibid.* p. 407.

8. Jayatilleke *ibid.* p. 404.

9. *atakkāvacaṇa*, *Dīghanikāya* i.12 = *Majjhimanikāya* i.487 = *Samyuttanikāya* i.136.

experience of an honest truthseeking meditator. Moreover Buddhism realized that argumentation is a double-edged sword; it works to the spiritual disadvantage of both the winner and the loser. The winner earns hatred and jealousy from the other, and the loser lies depressed.<sup>10</sup> Therefore it is to be shunned on moral grounds. Philosophical debaters during the time of the Buddha had an unhealthy psychological attitude. They were very arrogant about their oratorical skills, and Saccaka can be cited as a glaring example.<sup>11</sup> He boasted that there was no philosopher or religious teacher who would not tremble and sweat with fear when confronted by him for a debate. He said he could harass an opponent as a strong man would pull a goat to and fro, catching hold of him by his long beard. When challenged by him, even an inanimate pillar would display tremors; how much more would a sentient human being! Such was Saccaka's arrogant boast. Buddhism depreciates this attitude and maintains that, by being attached to one's own point of view and by looking down upon the views of others, man creates a great fetter for himself.<sup>12</sup>

There were also debaters during the time of the Buddha, known as *vitandavadins*, who did not have a point of view of their own to put forward, but merely indulged in eristic for the sake of securing victory in debates.<sup>13</sup> Pali texts describe them as wandering about, shattering the views of others with hairsplitting arguments.<sup>14</sup> They were notorious for praising themselves and condemning others. The Buddha depreciated these attitudes as they were not only useless, but positively harmful for spiritual advancement and acquisition of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> But on the other hand there was a set of educated people, whom the Pali texts describe as *vinñū*

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10. *jayaṃ veraṃ pasavati dukkhaṃ seti parājito. Dhammapada* 201.
  11. *Majjhimanikāya* i.227.
  12. *Suttanipāta* 798.
  13. Jayatilleke *ibid.* p. 217 f.
  14. *Dīghanikāya* i.26; *Samyuttanikāya* v.73; Jayatilleke *ibid.* p. 221.
  15. *Cūlavijūhasutta* and *Mahāvijūhasutta, Suttanipāta* 878-914.



or the intelligentsia, who were honest truth-seekers.<sup>16</sup> They came to the Buddha with an open mind and the Buddha really appreciated their healthy attitude and the spirit of inquiry. Though the Buddha and his disciples looked down upon debates, they always encouraged the spiritual quest and fact finding philosophical discussions.<sup>17</sup> They sometimes went out of their way to meet other religious sects and the *suttas* record valuable *dhamma* discussions which took place on such occasions.<sup>18</sup>

The Buddhist attitude towards the *dhamma* also was such that it discouraged involvement in philosophical debates. The Buddha regarded the *dhamma* as a means to an end. He compares the *dhamma* to a raft with which to ferry across the flood of *samsāra*.<sup>19</sup> After crossing over, it is foolish to carry the raft on one's shoulder. Though intrinsically true, the instrumental value of the *dhamma* is emphasized to discourage brandishing it as a philosophy for defense and offense in debate which was a popular social institution of the day. The Buddha was more interested in getting his disciples to practise and live according to the *dhamma* to gain experience of spiritual truths, which he himself realized, than getting them involved in philosophical debates. The Buddha emphasized that man's predicament in the world is such that he has to act quickly, as if his head was on fire.<sup>20</sup> He has no time to waste on philosophical debates; he has to energetically engage himself in the task of liberating himself from worldly misery. This was the pragmatic attitude towards the *dhamma* and it no doubt colours the Buddhist attitude towards other religions as well. Jayatilleke<sup>21</sup> observes that evidence of the texts indicates that the Buddha refrained from joining issue with

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16. Jayatilleke *ibid.* p. 229, 405.

17. *Dīghanikāya* i.163.

18. *Dīghanikāya* i.178; iii.39; *Majjhimanikāya* ii.29.

19. *Majjhimanikāya* i.134, 260.

20. *Samyuttanikāya* i.13, 53; v.440.

21. Jayatilleke *ibid.* p. 407.

other religionists in debate as far as possible, though he seems to have accepted the challenge when they came to him with questions for the purpose of debate.<sup>22</sup> He generally preferred to expound his own doctrine rather than get involved in criticising the doctrines of others. Once two brahmins came to the Buddha and stated that *Pūraṇa Kassapa* and *Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta* expressed contradictory views about the extent of the universe, and inquired from the Buddha which of them was correct. Buddha replied. "Let that be aside, I will teach you the *dhamma*".<sup>23</sup> Similar was his reply to *Subhaddha*, who came to him when he was on his death-bed with the question whether all the famous religious teachers of the day understood the truth, or none understood, or only some of them understood.<sup>24</sup>

The *Udumbarikaśihanādasutta*<sup>25</sup> specifically states the Buddha's altruistic motive in preaching the doctrine. The Buddha says he does not preach the *dhamma* with the desire to augment his following; people may continue to follow any teacher of their choice. Nor does the Buddha preach with a desire to prevent the hearers from following the rules of their own religious institutions. It is immaterial for the Buddha whether they continue to observe rules of their own institutions. Further, the Buddha does not wish to make the hearers secede from their chosen modes of livelihood. They may continue their own life styles. Neither does the Buddha desire to confirm them in activities which their teachers deem are harmful. The Buddha does not also wish to dissuade them from activities which their teachers hold to be beneficial. They may continue to hold as harmful or beneficial any activity according to the instructions of their own teachers. The Buddha preaches to the people because, as a matter of fact, there are unwholesome activities, which, if not abandoned, bring grave suffering not only in this life but in the unforeseen future as well. It is for the sake of abandoning these unskilful,

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22. *Majjhimanikāya* i.227-237. 371-387, 392; *Samyuttanikāya* iv.323.

23. *Āṅguttaranikāya* iv.429.

24. *Dīghanikāya* ii.150, 151.

25. *Dīghanikāya* iii. 56.

unwholesome activities that the Buddha preaches the doctrine, so that those who follow the instructions will grow in moral purity and attain realization and lasting happiness.

Thus it is plainly pointed out that the Buddha has no ulterior motive of gaining a large following in preaching the *dhamma*, nor the idea of depriving other religious teachers of a large membership. The listeners may affiliate themselves with any religious teacher of their wish. But if they put away the unwholesome activities which the Buddha points out as having grave harmful consequences, they themselves will be the fortunate beneficiaries of insightful wisdom and lasting happiness.

To further illustrate the authentic attitude of the Buddha towards other religions the episode of the conversion of Upali<sup>26</sup> can be cited. He was a well known man with a good reputation in society during the Buddha's day. He was a follower of Jainism, which was another religious sect founded by a senior contemporary of the Buddha, Jina Mahavira. Upali was persuaded by Mahavira to hold a debate with the Buddha on the theory of *kamma*. Upali visited the Buddha and had a discussion. He was convinced that the Buddha's point of view was sound and he confessed faith in the Buddha as a new convert. At this point the Buddha cautioned him, saying that when a person of recognised social standing, as Upali was, takes a decision of this importance to change from one religion to another, he must do so only after very careful consideration. Upali was surprised and more pleased by this comment of the Buddha. He explained that if any other religious sect found a new convert in him, they would have hoisted flags and broadcast the fact by beating drums throughout the city. But the Buddha, on the contrary, had asked him to consider his decision carefully. Upali reconfirmed his conviction. The Buddha then advised Upali not to withdraw patronage extended to the Jains. Such was the tolerant sympathetic attitude Buddhism adopted towards other religions.

The Buddhist attitude to other religions is further coloured by its pragmatic considerations. What motivated the Buddha to preach the doctrine was his sympathy towards mankind. His

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26. *Upālisutta. Majjhimanikāya* i. 371-387.

only concern was to show mankind the means to get rid of suffering. Therefore speculations such as the origin of the world, its extent and duration are of no value to him. He boldly left such speculations aside unanswered despite great philosophical interest displayed in such questions at that time.<sup>27</sup> Buddha defined the scope of his philosophy within the Four Noble Truths -

1. The truth of the unsatisfactory nature of human existence,
2. the truth of the cause of this unsatisfactory condition,
3. the truth of the cessation of this unsatisfactory condition, and
4. the truth of the path leading to the cessation of this unsatisfactory condition.<sup>28</sup>

The Buddha refused to make any pronouncement beyond the limits of these four truths. He had a specific purpose in life and he strictly confined himself to this purpose. He did not transgress the limits of his defined purpose merely to cater to the intellectual curiosity of man. He admitted that he did not preach all that he discovered in his quest for spiritual emancipation. What he preached to mankind was equivalent to a handful of leaves, whereas what he understood but refrained from preaching was similar to the leaves in the forest.<sup>29</sup> Therefore he deliberately avoided getting involved in philosophical arguments which were irrelevant to his spiritual mission. He preached only what was true and useful and he preferred to ignore what did not serve an useful purpose.<sup>30</sup>

The Buddha advocated that man has to seek out his emancipation by personal effort. The Buddhas are only guides; they can only point out the path and each man has to tread that path to make an end of suffering.<sup>31</sup> The Buddhas are no savio-

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27. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 484-489; *Dīghanikāya* i. 187-191.

28. *Samyuttanikāya* v. 418; *Dīghanikāya* i. 189, 191.

29. *Samyuttanikāya* v. 438.

30. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 395.

31. *Dhammapada* 276.

urs. During the time of the Buddha there were brahmins who invoked and prayed to various gods such as *Indra*, *Soma* and *Varuṇa* for salvation. The Buddha pointed out the futility of such prayer with an appropriate simile. It is like a man who, wishing to cross over a river, stands on one bank and prays that the other bank should come over to him. However much he prays, invokes and wishes, the other bank of the river would never come over to him.<sup>32</sup> What he should do is to strive hard and cross over himself with the strength of his own hands and feet.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, if a man wishes to be reborn in the companionship of Brahmas, he has to cultivate the spiritual qualities that are found among the Brahmas and not just pray to the Brahmas.<sup>34</sup> Thus Buddhism expresses a definite attitude towards the futility of the assertion some religions make on the efficacy of prayer and the grace of God, or gods, for man's liberation.

The famous *Kālamāsutta*<sup>35</sup> clearly explains the correct attitude an intelligent man should adopt towards any religion. No religious proposition should be accepted as true merely on grounds of faith, reason, reputation of teacher or on subjective bias. They should be tested against experience. A *Mahāyāna sūtra* goes on to admonish that they should be subjected to the most rigorous test as one would test gold by cutting, rubbing and burning.<sup>36</sup> It is only when one is convinced that the course of action propounded by a religion leads to one's happiness that one should accept it as one's philosophy of life. In the *Vimāṃsakasutta*<sup>37</sup> the Buddha invites his disciples to examine even the conduct of the Buddha himself. The Buddha claims to be free from all greed, hatred and delusion; disciples should not take this at face value, they should be

32. *Dīghanikāya* i. 244.

33. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 135.

34. *Dīghanikāya* i. 247, 251.

35. *Āṅguttaranikāya* i. 189.

36. Jayatilleke *ibid.* p. 391.

37. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 317.

vigilant about the Buddha's conduct and see for themselves whether the Buddha's physical and verbal behaviour betrays the presence of negative emotions and ignorance. If on investigation they find no trace of negative emotions and ignorance, then they should come to the conclusion that the Buddha is morally and intellectually perfect, and not on mere faith. Thus Buddhism advocates the critical assessment by truth-seekers, not only of other religions, but even of itself and of its founder.

The teachings of the Buddha are open to one and all.<sup>38</sup> No man is debarred from learning the *dhamma* on grounds of caste, creed, sex or nationality. This fact is important when we consider the social background of the Buddha's day. *Vedas* were considered to contain the divinely inspired sacred truths, and they were not to be chanted within the earshot of *śūdras*, the untouchable outcastes. The *Manusmṛiti*, a later Brahmanic text, asserts that he who explains the sacred law to a *śūdra* or dictates to him a penance, will sink together with that man into the hell called *asamvṛta*.<sup>39</sup> But Buddhism stipulated no such discrimination. Nor did the Buddha teach any esoteric doctrine to be imparted only to a chosen few. Similarly he did not limit the freedom of his disciples by prohibiting them to study the doctrines of other religions. A Buddhist is free to study any religion or discipline. It does not matter from which source one learns what is true and useful.

To illustrate the point the episode of Pukkusāti can be cited.<sup>40</sup> He was a young mendicant and once he spent the night in a potter's shed. The Buddha too happened to go there to spend the night, and the two did now know each other. The Buddha was impressed by the calm demeanour of the young mendi-

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38. *apārutā tesam amatassa dvārā*  
*ye sotavanto, paṃñeantū saddham,* *Majjhimanikāya* i. 169.

39. *Manusmṛiti*, Sacred Books of the East. vol. xxv, Oxford (1886) iv. 81.

40. *Majjhimanikāya* iii. 238.

cant. The Buddha asked him who his teacher was and whose doctrine he followed. Pukkusati replied that he is a follower of the Buddha and that he appreciated the doctrine of the Buddha. The Buddha asked whether he has seen the Buddha and whether he could recognise him, were he to see him. He replied that he has never seen the Buddha and that he could not recognise him. Without disclosing his own identity Buddha preached the doctrine and the young mendicant was greatly benefitted. It is said that he attained the penultimate stage of saintship.

This episode clearly shows that it is immaterial from whom one learns the truth, for Pukkusati did not know that the Buddha himself was speaking to him. If the teaching is true and if one follows it meticulously in one's physical, verbal and mental behaviour, results will follow automatically, irrespective of the source from where the idea came.

In a number of passages in the Pali Canon the Noble Eightfold Path is declared as the one and only path to emancipation. The *Maggsamyutta*<sup>41</sup> maintains that it is only a fully enlightened Buddha who can discover the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the pure, unblemished path to emancipation. The *Dhammapada*<sup>42</sup> maintains that the Noble Eightfold Path is the noblest of all paths and that it is the only path to knowledge and purity. In the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*<sup>43</sup> the Buddha tells Subhadda that there are no saints or perfected beings outside the Noble Eightfold Path. The *Dhammapada*<sup>44</sup> states that there are no saints outside, just as there are no foot prints in the air.

These statements give us a clue to the Buddhist attitude to other religions. Any religion is true and efficacious to the extent to which it contains aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path. In whatever religion the Eightfold Path, comprising the

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41. *Samyuttanikāya* v. 15.

42. *Dhammapada* 273-274.

43. *Dīghanikāya* ii. 151.

44. *Ākāse padam n'atthi, samaṇo n'atti bhāhīre*, *Dhammapada* 254-255.

cultivation of moral habits (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), is found, in that religion there would be saints and perfected beings.

Still other *suttas* look at the question of the possibility of liberation through other religious systems from another point of view. The *Nagaravindeyyasutta*<sup>45</sup> maintains that recluses who have eliminated greed, hatred and delusion, and those who have embarked on a course of action to put an end to these negative traits, deserve to be honoured. The *Chachakkasutta*<sup>46</sup> upholds that it is impossible to make an end of suffering without eliminating the greed for pleasant sensations, the aversion for unpleasant sensations and the ignorance regarding neutral sensations. We are kept bound to *samsaric* life because we yearn for pleasure. Pleasure is nothing but pleasurable sensation. If we are to make an end of suffering, i.e. transcend *samsaric* life, we have to understand the nature of sensations in all their aspects. Sensations arise and pass away, changeability and dynamism are their very nature. They have to be mastered by contemplating them, by mindfully observing them, and this method is known in Pali as *vedananupassana*. When one practises this method one understands that greed underlies all pleasurable sensations, because when we experience pleasurable sensations we long for more of them. On the other hand, hatred or aversion underlies unpleasant painful sensations, because when we experience painful sensations we rebel against them and we want to get rid of them. As for neutral sensations, we are generally unaware of them. So whatever the sensation, we are caught up with greed, hatred and delusion, which have to be eliminated to make an end of suffering. Therefore Buddhism maintains that, for a religion to be an effective means of liberation, it has to teach a method of getting rid of greed, hatred and delusion (*lobha/ rāga, dosa and mōha*).<sup>47</sup>

In the *Cūlasīhanādasutta*<sup>48</sup> the Buddha makes the bold assertion that the four types of saints, *sotapanna* (the stream

45. *Majjhimanikāya* iii. 201.

46. *Majjhimanikāya* iii. 285.

47. *ibid.*

48. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 63.



enterer ), *sakadāgāmi* (the once returner) *anāgāmi* ( the non-returner ) and the *arahant* ('the worthy one') are to be found only in the Buddhist dispensation. The *sutta* continues that it is possible that a disciple of another religious order may inquire as to the grounds on which this assertion is made. The Buddha explains that the ultimate goal is one and not many and that this goal is to be won only by those who are absolutely free from negative psychological traits such as greed, hatred, delusion, desire, addiction (*upādāna*) etc., and not by those who are not rid of them. Moreover, the *sutta* goes on to explain that generally religious systems are divided into two broad opposing categories, namely those who believe in (eternal) existence and those who believe in annihilation. Neither of these two groups realistically understands the origin of these views, the cessation of these views, the satisfaction arising out of them, the evil consequences entailing them, and the escape therefrom.<sup>49</sup> Those who do not know these aspects of these views are not free from greed, hatred, delusion etc. Therefore it is impossible that they are free from birth, old age, death and suffering.

The *sutta*<sup>50</sup> goes on to elucidate that there are four types of *upādānas*. This word means grasping, clinging, involvement, addiction, and obsession. They are obsession with sense pleasures (*kāmapādāna*), obsession with various views (*ditṭhupādāna*), obsession with habits (*silabbatupādāna*) and obsession with egoistic views (*attavadupādāna*). Though generally religious teachers claim to understand all forms of obsessions, they in fact do not understand all obsession as obsessions, nor do they know the causal genesis of these obsessions. One can only get rid of suffering by the wisdom arising out of the understanding of this causal genesis. As no known philosophy of the day had propounded the causal genesis of man's psychological obsessions in such lucid detail, the Buddha makes this fearless declaration, figuratively called 'the Lion's Roar', that there are no saints of the first, second, third and the fourth degree among other religious systems.

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49. *Samudayaṅ ca atthaqamaṅ ca āssādaṅ ca ādīnavaṅ ca nissaraṇaṅ ca yathabhūtaṅ nappajānanti*, *Majjhimanikāya* i. 65.

50. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 66.

The *Nivāpasutta*<sup>51</sup> enumerates three types of religious men who have not gone beyond the clutches of *Māra*, the evil one. The first type comprises those who indulge in sense pleasures without any restraint. The second type comprises those who go to the other extreme of self-mortification. Without being able to sustain life by such mortification, they too become the prey of *Māra*. The third type is careful enough to partake of sense pleasures with due restraint, but are given to philosophical speculations. They become involved in futile speculative exercises regarding the duration and the extent of the universe, the nature of the soul, and the mode of existence of the liberated one after death. Thereby they too cannot go beyond the snare of the evil one.

This classification gives us a fair idea of the Buddhist estimation of the practices of other religions. Buddhism belongs to the fourth type listed in the *sutta* and its characteristics are the moderate enjoyment of sense pleasures with due care and restraint for the purpose of maintaining the body in sound health, non-indulgence in metaphysical speculations and the cultivation of mental purity and understanding. The usual super-conscious meditative states from one to eight and the destruction of mental defilement are defined as states which are beyond the vision of *Māra* and his attendant host.

The *Mahādūkkhakkhandhasutta*<sup>52</sup> contains an interesting discussion which is relevant for our present topic. An ascetic of another religious sect raises the following question: "The recluse *Gotama* claims to understand the nature of sense pleasures (*kāma*), the nature of the physical form (*rūpa*) and the nature of sensations (*vedanā*). We too make the same claim. Now what is the difference between these two claims as regards the teaching and instructions?" The Buddha explains that these three phenomena, i.e. sense pleasures, physical form and sensations, should be understood

- (a) according to the satisfaction they yield,
- (b) according to the dangers they entail, and
- (c) according to the escape therefrom.

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51. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 151-160.

52. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 83-90.

The Buddha maintains that he sees none in the whole world of gods and men, who could understand these phenomena in their entirety according to these classifications except a Buddha, a disciple of a Buddha, or someone who has heard the explanation from either of them.<sup>53</sup>

It would be interesting to cite at least the discussion on one of them to gain an idea of the Buddha's explanation in detail. What is the satisfaction of sense pleasures? There are five strands of sense pleasures - forms cognizable by the eye, sounds cognizable by the ear, smells cognizable by the nose, tastes cognizable by the tongue, and tangible objects cognizable by the body, all pleasant, delightful, attractive and endearing. The pleasure derived by the enjoyment of these pleasant sense objects is the satisfaction they yield.

The next question is: What are the dangers of these sense pleasures? One has to work hard to earn these sense pleasures, by being engaged in some occupation or another. This is no easy task. It is possible that one may not be successful in one's occupation and that is a source of great anxiety. Even if one is successful in one's profession, one has the troublesome task of looking after the wealth thus earned, so that it is not confiscated by the state, carried away by robbers, ruined by fire and floods or inherited by unloved heirs. Great disputes arise among various groups, even among parents and children, among siblings, among friends, all because of sense pleasures. Sometimes wars are waged, causing the loss of a great many lives; atrocious crimes are committed and cruel punishments are meted out, all on account of sense pleasures. While these are the evil consequences of sense pleasures visible in this very life, great are the sufferings one has to undergo after death, if one misconducts oneself with regard to sense pleasures. These are the evil consequences of sense pleasures. What is the escape from sense pleasures? Eradication of the desire and lust for sense pleasures is the escape from sense pleasures. The other two phenomena are also similarly discussed in detail in the *sutta*.

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53. *Majjhimanikāya* i. 85.

What is important for our purpose here is that Buddhism maintains that it is not possible to attain final liberation from suffering without a profound understanding of these phenomena from all these aspects of experience. It is not evident that any religious sect outside the pale of Buddhism has explained these phenomena so lucidly, or even focussed attention on them. The *Maggasamyutta*<sup>54</sup> observes that among men only a few cross over, the majority only run about along the coast.

According to a *sutta* in the *Āṅguttaranikāya*<sup>55</sup> the Buddha was once asked whether he hoped to save one third or one half or the whole of humanity by the path he discovered. Nowhere has the Buddha made such a claim. But, it is explained, that just as a door-keeper, guarding the one and only door to a place, knows that all who enter this palace should enter through this door, so the Buddha knows that all those who were liberated in the past, who are being liberated now, and who will be liberated in the future have to pass through this path and no other. The path mentioned in this *sutta* emphasizes the eradication of the five hindrances, the practice of the four stations of mindfulness, and the cultivation of the seven factors of enlightenment. The *Saccasamyutta*<sup>56</sup> maintains that all Buddhas of the past, present and future realise the four noble truths. It is said that it is impossible to make an end of suffering without realising these four noble truths, just as it is impossible to fetch water in a vessel made of *khadira* leaves.<sup>57</sup>

In the *Sandakasutta*<sup>58</sup> Ānanda enumerates four pseudo-religions (*abrahmacariyavāsa*) and four unsatisfactory religions

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54. *appakā te manussesu ye janā pāraṅgāmino athayam itarā pajā tiram evanudhavati, Samyuttanikāya v. 24; Āṅguttaranikāya v. 233*
55. *Āṅguttaranikāya v. 195.*
56. *Samyuttanikāya v. 433.*
57. *Samyuttanikāya v. 438.*
58. *Majjhimanikāya i. 514.*

(*anassāsikāni brahmacariyāni*). The four pseudo religions are (a) materialism, which maintains that death is the end of life and that both the foolish and the wise are annihilated at death, (b) religions which deny moral validity, (c) religions which deny moral causation and human enterprise, and (d) religions which deny even the value of life and uphold a theory of deterministic evolutionism. It is observed that no intelligent man would consider becoming a disciple under such religious teachers as, if their tenets are true, no useful purpose will be served either by following or not following those religions.

The unsatisfactory religions are (a) those where the teacher claims omniscience with ever-present continuous knowledge, (b) those which are based on revelation, (c) those which depend on mere logic and reasoning, and (d) those which are based on revelation, (c) those which depend on mere logic and reasoning, and (d) those which resort to skepticism. An intelligent man would not choose any one of these religions for a number of reasons. On investigation he would find that the teacher does not show evidence of having omniscience as he claims. Revelation is not an adequate criterion of truth. Experiential truths cannot be verified by mere logic and reasoning. The skeptics have no positive contribution to make to knowledge. For this variety of reasons the latter set of four religions are set aside as unsatisfactory.

Having made all these observations from original *suttas* of the Pali Canon, it is interesting to quote a statement made by the Buddha in the *Suttanipāta*:<sup>59</sup> "I do not say that all recluses and *brahmanas* are involved in decay and death". Here the Buddha seems to accept the possibility of emancipated beings among other religious sages. We are reminded that Buddhism also recognizes a class of emancipated beings with a very high degree of enlightenment called Pacceka Buddhas. They do not attain enlightenment, having heard the doctrine from a Buddha or an arahant. They are self-enlightened and they have to be reckoned as sages outside the dispensation of a Buddha.

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59. *Suttanipāta* 1082.

Tradition maintains that Pacceka Buddhas do not arise in the world at a time when the doctrine of a Buddha is known. Pacceka Buddhas are incapable of preaching the doctrine to another so as to lead him to emancipation, most likely because the path by which they attained enlightenment is not systematically understood by them. The *Sotapattisamyutta* <sup>60</sup> states that those who have no conviction in the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *sangha*, but who are endowed with the spiritual faculties of faith/self-confidence (*saddhā*), energy (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), are not born in states of woe (*duggati*).

Let me conclude this essay by summarizing that Buddhism does not completely rule out the possibility of the presence of emancipated beings in other religious traditions. But it certainly asserts that it is impossible to attain liberation without the cultivation of moral habits (*sīla*), mental culture or concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Any religion is true to the extent it incorporates aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path, and any religion is false to the extent it deviates from this path. Buddhism adopts an attitude of tolerance towards other religious ideologies and appreciates and evaluates them according to their respective truth values. It avoids debate and argumentation, but encourages dialogue and open-minded inquiry.

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