



On Philosophical Issues In Relation To Buddhism

Part 1

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The Sannasa article on "Philosophical Issues In Relation To Buddhism" (Sannasa – February 2012) is very critical of Buddhism and complains that Buddhists criticize other religions. Criticizing other religions is extremely immoral and should not happen in any civilized society. The Great Emperor Asoka of India has said, "Whosoever honours his own religion and condemns others' 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." In today's civilized societies Buddhists must refrain from criticizing or condemning others' religions and hurting others' feelings. The article has been written by a person who doesn't understand the basics of Buddhism and is full of errors and distortions. I fully agree with what the writer states about his own religion, but disagree with what he states about Buddhism. The purpose of this article is to correct any misconceptions about Buddhism resulting from that article.

The writer says that the aim of his article is to discipline Buddhist clergy and laities. If any individual person believes that he can discipline over 350 million Buddhists all over the world and over a million Buddhist monks he is a person who feels that he is super human and one must psychologically understand his mental state before reading an article written by him.

The writer says, "Religious philosophies may be true, may not be true as all religious philosophies are based on the concepts of faith rather than secular practical experiences and many assumptions in religions could not be scientifically or materially tested and proved." This statement is not applicable to Buddhism.

The terms used to describe the word 'religion' in dictionaries are, "a belief system, a system of faith and worship, and human recognition of super human controlling power and especially of personal God enti-

pled to obedience." Most of these terms do not apply to Buddhism. The term 'faith' is applicable to Buddhism after adding the qualifying term 'non blind'. The term 'worship' applies to Buddhism with the qualifying phrase 'as a form of respect to the Triplegem.' The words used to describe the word 'science' are, "systematic formulated knowledge, knowledge dealing with phenomena and based on observation and experiment." The first phrase here applies to rational knowledge which is limited to the material world and therefore it is not relevant to Buddhism. The second phrase applies to Buddhism. This shows that Buddhism is not just another religion, but much more than a mere religion.

His Holiness Dalai Lama addressing a conference on "Buddhism and Science" said that in learning or acquiring knowledge on Buddhism there are four authentic agents of authority. They are the scriptures, commentarial texts, authentic teachers and one's own experience. Scriptures are the written records of the words of Lord Buddha, the Sutras or the Tripitaka. It is the most authentic agent of authority. This step is common to all religions and science. All religions have scriptures and science has theorems and laws documented in scientific journals. The agent of next level of authority is the commentarial texts. These are books that give more simple descriptions of the material in original scriptures written by persons who have high levels of knowledge of Buddhism. This step is also common to all religions and science. In every religion there are explanatory texts and in science there are science text books. The agent of third level of authority is the authentic teacher. This step is common to all religions and science. Anyone who wants to learn a religion or science will start with a teacher. One proceeds to learn from text books once one is confident that one has got a foothold on the subject from a teacher. Thereafter one may proceed to examine the original scriptures or journal publications.

The fourth agent of authority is the one of great importance and it is the step that makes Buddhism different from other religions. It is one's own experience or experiment and observation. This step is

common to Buddhism and science.

Richard Feynman, an American Nobel Laureate for Physics and one of the most eminent modern scientists, describes the modern science procedure for authenticating a new law of science as, "Now I am going to discuss how we would look for a new law. In general we look for a new law by the following process. First we guess it. Then we compute the consequences of the guess to see what would be implied if this law that we guessed is right. Then we compare the results of the computation to nature with experiment or experience, compare it directly with observation to see if it works. If it disagrees with experiment it is wrong. In that simple statement is the key to science."

The last step, experiment or experience and observation is most important. If observation shows that a law is not true, thereafter, after ascertaining the validity of the experiment and observation, the law gets rejected. This is the way science retains what is true and rejects what is not true. It prevents science from becoming an accumulation of loose statements. Same is the case with Buddhism. In this way science has progressed and generated enormous material benefits to mankind and Buddhism has provided them enormous spiritual benefits.

Buddhism requires Buddhists to examine everything taught in Buddhism for their veracity before accepting (Kalama Sutta). Buddhists are required not to accept anything through faith or belief merely because it comes from an authoritative source, powerful source, tradition or scriptures until they are satisfied that it is true. Even the word of Lord Buddha is not to be accepted through blind faith without questioning, examining and finding that it is true. It is only in Buddhism that the adherents have the freedom to scientifically examine the truth of the teachings of Buddhism. Every teaching of Buddhism that has been tested by the modern science procedure described by Richard Feynman has been found to be scientifically true. This is how the concept of rebirth was proved to be scientifically true. The greatest scientist of all times, Albert Einstein said of Buddhism, "If there is any religion that would cope with

the modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism."

Buddhism and science are the only knowledge systems that use the fourth agent of authority to weed out what is not true and maintain the knowledge free from untruths. This technique of questioning, examining, testing and verifying works well for Buddhism and science because both these knowledge systems are based on the factual nature of reality examined through the two streams of knowledge the human beings are blessed with.

Dr. Joseph Murphy (Doctor of Divinity) describes the duality of human mind as, "You have only one mind, but that one mind possesses two distinct and characteristic functional parts. The two functions of your mind are essentially different from each other. Each has its own separate and distinct attributes and powers." He uses the terms 'conscious mind' and 'subconscious mind' to represent the two aspects of the human mind. Dr. Fritjof Capra, an eminent nuclear scientist in The USA, who has been researching for a long time on science and spirituality says, "Throughout history, it has been recognized that the human mind is capable of two kinds of knowledge or two modes of consciousness which have often been termed the rational (conscious mind) and the intuitive (subconscious mind)." These two streams of knowledge are referred to, in different societies, as 'lower knowledge' (conscious mind) and 'higher knowledge' (subconscious mind), 'relative knowledge' and 'absolute knowledge', and 'conditional truth' and 'transcendental truth'. Capra describes the knowledge through the subconscious mind as, "A direct insight which lies outside the realm of the intellect (the faculty that acquires rational knowledge through the conscious mind, sense organs and thinking) and is obtained by watching rather than thinking; by looking inside oneself; by observation. DT Suzuki describes it as, "Seeing plays the most important role in Buddhist epistemology. Buddhist philosophy therefore ultimately points to seeing reality as it is. Seeing is experiencing enlightenment."

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