

## Christian 'Bodhi - citta'

A 'user-friendly' article by Elaine M. Robson.  
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people naturally view things as having intrinsic existence. That is, they are not 'dependent' – not part of the cause and effect process. But somehow they exist independently.

Just as practising Buddhists have a strong aspiration to share the Buddhist dharma with those around them, Christians, on the other hand, already think in a different way from what Buddhism describes as the so too Christians want to share their faith in Jesus' normal unenlightened mind'. When we have Christ with others. Sharing one's beliefs with others is discovered Truth in the Bible, in conjunction with the not always easy. It requires respect for the other renewing of our minds by the Holy Spirit, we find it person who has a different faith persuasion from your difficult to relate to these Buddhist assertions. Our own.

mind has already been re-programmed! Christians already understand everything as being dependent – as

I write this article in response to a request to help part of the cause and effect process and therefore Christians understand a little more about the basics of lacking in intrinsic existence. The Buddhist claim that Tibetan Buddhism. Of course those who are all human beings are searching for happiness can Buddhists are very welcome to read my essay and seem inadequate for the Christian. He/she sees the comment on any of the points.

quest for significance as equally relevant. Answers to questions such as 'Why am I here?', 'Who made me?',

**Some important differences between Christianity and Buddhism** 'What is the purpose of life?' supersede the 'I want to be happy' syndrome.

In a nutshell, Buddhism is the study of the mind. It is The fundamental difference between Buddhism and not the study of God. Christians frequently fail to understand this. Buddhism aims to re-program the result of the cause and effect process, and that mind to enable it to respond to what it perceives ultimately everything depends upon God the Creator, naturally in a different way.

who is Himself outside time and space. He is not part of the causal process. It makes no sense to ask 'Who

Buddhism's focus is on the difference between caused God?' He is unique and is the very initiator of appearance and reality. It teaches that unenlightened causality.

people think of everyday phenomena (things) as permanent, i.e. not that they don't decay but that

Buddhists however disagree, seeing the cause and effect process as an infinite process. They teach that it is eternal.

is without any initiating or starting-off point.

Therefore the question 'How did everything begin?' is seen as totally irrelevant and not worth discussing!

The Buddhist world view however is very different from the Christian one. It adamantly rejects the concept of an intrinsically self-existent God – the

Instead a more pertinent question to ask would be, 'initial cause and sustainer of all things. The belief in

'Look around and ask yourself why is there something multiple universes that come and go – arise – abide – (anything at all) rather than nothing (at all)?' Because disintegrate – is a core Buddhist doctrine. The

things actually do exist it is relevant to ask such a suffering situation in which we find ourselves – question. But what is meant by the statement 'Things *Samsara* – is said to have had no beginning.

exist!?' The Buddhist describes things as merely suffering is seen as intrinsic to the birth, life and existing *conventionally* (everyday existence as death process. The word in Tibetan for universe or

perceived through our senses) and not *ultimately*. The world is *jikden* which means 'possessing destruction'.

Christian is able to understand this statement since

he/she too sees everything about him/her as having a causal relationship. And the Christian would also say post Adam and Eve's fall into sin. In fact it is an

that there is nothing that inherently – in and of itself – excellent word to describe our current world, which is has the ability to remain permanently. He/she most definitely in the grip of disintegration.

responds to the question, 'Why is there something

rather than nothing?' by saying that the something that exists is enabled to do so because of God's words in Genesis ch.1 about God creating a good

sustaining power which upholds all dependent world and then use the word *jikden* for that good phenomena. There is nothing which is a result (a world! (Translators have yet to find or coin a new

product) of the cause and effect process that exists word to solve this dilemma – any suggestions?!)

intrinsically in and of itself. And if the self-existent

Creator God withdrew His sustaining power (support), As I have already stated, for the Buddhist, the cause then every single causally dependent thing would and effect process is viewed as infinite, (i.e. as far as a

immediately fall apart. He who created everything is backward regression is concerned). Therefore if a able to cause the total annihilation (if He so wished) Christian in the early stages of a dialogue tries to

of each and every dependent phenomenon. But God, centre the discussion on what might be an initial cause, the results may not be very productive!

## What is mind programming all about?

To re-program the mind is a fundamental aim in critical insight whereby the critical faculties are brought fully into play in a *detailed reflexive analysis* Buddhist practice.

- 1 It is aided by various meditational practices of the meditator's own state of mind. and (in Tibetan Buddhism) the use of visualisation. Thus Buddhism teaches that a deep philosophical
- 2 The natural mind is considered to be insight into the nature of things is needed for complete unenlightened, i.e. it doesn't see reality as it liberation from the wheel of life. really is but fabricates its own false interpretation of the everyday (conventional) So what is the Christian's good news to the world it engages with. Nor does the natural Buddhist? mind grasp the ultimate reality (true nature) of things, i.e. their emptiness or 'Jesus Saves!' But what does that really mean to non-substantiality. your Buddhist friend?
- 3 To be enlightened is to be set free from the repetitive cycle of birth, death and rebirth. 1 What we say must be relevant. No-one wants to listen to a viewpoint that is not engaging with issues that are pertinent to the listener. This release is said to occur only as the true nature of things is realised. (See note below.) It is important not to get side-tracked. One needs to focus on the basic ideas (doctrines) of Buddhism and not get bogged down in the details of meditational techniques, nor in a drawn out recounting of unsubstantiated mythological events. Meditational practice is considered to be 2 The issue of suffering is central to Buddhist thought and may well provide common ground for discussion. But we need to know how the Buddhist antidote to suffering is at variance with the antidote explained in the teachings of integral to the process of realisation.

## What is Buddhist meditation?

Damien Keown, in his excellent little book entitled *Buddhism – A Very Short Introduction* (pp98-100) 3 explains that the Buddha considered mere trance-like states to be only a diversion in the goal of removing suffering. He developed a completely new meditational technique: first the practice of *Samatha* or 'calming meditation' where there is a cessation of

intellectual activity; secondly, *vispassana* or 'insight meditation' where the aim is not that of peace and tranquillity but the generation of penetrating and

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Jesus and demonstrated in His earthly life. We all that exists intrinsically, meaning in and of itself, also need to appreciate any similarities. separate from and outside the cause and effect

4 The issue of *appearance* and *reality* is process.

foundational to Buddhism. Do you know what

a Buddhist understands by these terms? Find *Christians see God as the exception!* As explained relevant passages in the Bible and use these as earlier not only is He the sustainer of all life, He is the a basis in your discussions. One who brought phenomena into existence in the

5 Your personal testimony is important but first place. God is seen as the answer to the question, needs to be expressed in a way that can be 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' This understood by your listener. question is dealt with more fully in the autobiography

of an English philosopher and professor, Paul Williams, who was a practising Tibetan Buddhist for nearly twenty years. He recently converted to

### What is Buddhist reality?

The doctrine of 'no self' also needs to be discussed. Christianity, much to the surprise and amazement of Hindus understand the *atman* as some kind of soul, his Buddhist friends. His account is entitled *The essence or thing that is passed on from one life to the Unexpected Way – On converting from Buddhism to next as a consequence of rebirth.* There is considered *Catholicism.*

to be some kind of permanency or substantiality ISBN 0 567 08830 8 (T & T Clark International) associated with it.

A pertinent question which a Buddhist may well ask Buddha rejected this permanency and substantiality of a Christian is, 'If you, like us, do not accept the and emphasised the intrinsic emptiness Hindu concept of 'soul' what do you *mean* when you (non-substantiality) of everything, including the self – talk about a Christian having a soul?'

the *I* that we all refer to in conversation.

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As Christians we can certainly agree with our

Buddhist friends if emptiness is viewed as **Should Christians meditate?**

dependency, i.e. a product of the cause and effect

process. But where we must part company and Christians do indeed meditate but the question is, profoundly disagree is with the Buddhist statement "Should Christians engage deliberately in that 'all things *without exception* are a result of causes meditational practices that will induce altered states of and conditions' and that there is absolutely nothing at

consciousness? - in other words, override the natural processes of the mind?"

One aim of Buddhist meditation is to remove the division between subject and object (you and me / he / she / it / they). Such a separation is viewed as a consequence of being unenlightened. The natural mind is said to view things as having some sort of intrinsic existence and this is definitely considered to be a wrong view. It is taught that the enlightened mind does not differentiate between you and me, good and bad etc, and there is said to be a '*knowing*' that is beyond the reach and experience of the natural human mind.

### **A Christian response**

As Christians, what do we know about '*knowing*'? Consider these questions below.

- A Have you experienced *oneness* with the Lord that is not an activity of your intellectual gymnastics, i.e. that is not a result of conceptualisation?
- B What did Adam and Eve experience before the Fall? How was their relationship with God different from ours?
- C What do you think about Near Death experiences (NDE)? People claim to have experienced a knowing of what others were thinking. A blind patient who was a victim was able to describe in detail the whole

operating procedure after he became conscious again. He was still blind. It would seem that our limited understanding of the nature of the human mind is definitely challenged by such events.

The renewing of our minds is both an event and a process. The initial event is being 'born again' (John ch3 v3). The process is continued as we submit gladly to and co-operate with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, i.e. God the Holy Spirit as He is poured out upon us (Acts ch2 v3-4).

Finally, there is a *mystery* (i.e. the secret and hidden wisdom of God. RSV ) to the Gospel (1 Corinthians ch2 v7). We need to explore this *mystery* at a much greater depth and ask ourselves if we have the keys that will help us unlock something of that *mystery* so that it will become deeply relevant, not only for us but also for our dialogue partners?

we all have as individuals going on within our minds\*.

(\*Reader's Digest. September 2006. Listen to What You're Saying. By Phillip McGraw.)

Christ came to recreate that 'conversation'. He is able to destroy its negativity, a negativity that came as a result of Adam and Eve's deliberate disobedience and self-orientated behaviour.

Buddhists are acutely aware of the destructive nature of human existence. Christians can learn by seeking to respond biblically to the issues that preoccupy the thinking of their Buddhist friends and neighbours.

May God bring His enlightenment to us all as we search for Him – either knowingly or unknowingly.

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Elaine Robson.

Post Office Box 30.

Brecon, Wales, UK

LD3 7WJ