

God is love—and more

by Piya Tan

25 December is “Buddhist Renewal Day.” The presence of other world religions and their great successes show that human ideas are powerful can lead or mislead others. Much of the world’s sufferings in the past and today are due to religious wrong views. And this will continue if we do not educate ourselves in true goodness.

I would like to share a very important reflection on the role of Buddha Word in freeing the human mind from oppression, especially religious oppression. We can look at the evolution of human freedom and spiritual liberation as freeing society and the individual from the harmful aspects of the God-belief,

In the Buddha’s time, the brahmins used the God-idea and invented the universal soul to control the minds and wealth of the masses. Even then only the four classes of high society were allowed to practise brahmanical religion. The rest were outcastes, outside the privileged tribe. In many important discourses such as the Tevijja Sutta (D 13) and the Alagaddupama Sutta (M 22), the Buddha clearly speaks out on the falsehood and dangers of such ideas.

Tevijja Sutta: <http://dighanikaya.googlepages.com/1.8TevijjaSd13piya.pdf>

Alagaddupama Sutta: <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com/3.13AlagaddupamaSm22piya.pdf>

Then came the idea of the divine rights of kings, which asserted that kings (and queens) derived from God their absolute power over others and all things. By the 16th and 17th centuries we see the absolute monarchs rampantly abusing their power until Oliver Cromwell’s work broke this myth in England. Decades later this inspired the French Revolution similarly to reject royalty using the God-idea to empower themselves and persecute others.

Unfortunately, the white Europeans then saw God as white and used such ideas as an excuse to conquer “lesser” races (the non-Europeans) to bring them to God. This part of our history is so painful that it is understandable that some of us try to be optimistic and point to the benefits that colonialism had brought us. The point is that our forefathers had worked hard to liberate us, and we should be grateful to them.

Today, we still see the God-idea being abused by the terrorists, the mass bombers, the evangelists, and the intolerant teachers. I am deeply pained when I see so much hate in the faces of “God-believers” in the newspapers and violence in his name.

When I began my religious life, I was told by preachers that “God is love.” Later I found that this love is a very limited and tribal one. God only loves us if we are the members of a certain group. Otherwise, he will us send to hell, and so on.

Then I discovered Buddhism, and the Buddha too declares that “God is love.” The Buddha describes the goodness of God so completely, that it is almost impossible to add anything more positive.

God is LOVINGKINDNESS (unconditional love for all beings, divine, human and animal).

God is COMPASSION (he helps to make good everyone, no matter how bad: think of Guanyin).

God is ALTRUISTIC JOY (he is not dependent on your adoration and worship, but rejoices in your goodness).

Above all, God is EQUANIMITY (he remains inwardly still no matter what happens in the world: we are accountable for our actions, bad and good).

The most wonderful message the Buddha has given us is that God is not in heaven or out there, but right here within us (the kingdom of God is within us). You are filled with Godliness

when you are full of lovingkindness and unconditionally accept others;
when you are compassionate to those with problems or are not so fortunate;
when you rejoice in the success and goodness of others; and
when you are inwardly still, no matter what happens, despite the best you have done.

Plant the seeds of goodness, shine them with the light of lovingkindness, water them with compassion, weed and prune them with altruistic joy, and enjoy them with equanimity.

You need not change your religion to follow the Buddha's teachings. Turn your back from evil; walk towards the good. You will begin to understand the true meaning of whatever good that you believe in.

When you bow low enough, when you close your eyes in stillness, you will see the true God, and he is beyond the wildest dream of any religion or philosophy or holiness. This is the God that none of us can abuse. This God is truly love, light, life and liberation.

Please join me in this universal prayer for world peace and inner stillness. May we rise above all religions to see true reality directly with joy and peace.

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