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Blues for Buddha

By Jed McKenna

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Being critical of Buddhism isn't easy.

Buddhism is the most likable of the major religions, and Buddhists are the perennial good guys of modern spirituality. Beautiful traditions, lovely architecture, inspiring statuary, ancient history, the Dalai Lama — what's not to like?

Everything about Buddhism is just so... nice. No fatwabs or jihads, no inquisitions or crusades, no terrorists or pederasts, just nice people being nice. In fact, Buddhism means niceness. Nice-ism.

At least, it should.

Buddha means Awakened One, so Buddhism can be taken to mean Awake-ism. Awakism. It would therefore be natural to think that if you were looking to wake up, then Buddhism, i.e., Awakism, would be the place to look.

::: The Light is Better Over Here

Such thinking, however, would reveal a dangerous lack of respect for the opposition. Maya, goddess of delusion, has been doing her job with supreme mastery since the first spark of self-awareness flickered in some chimp's noggin, and the idea that the neophyte truth-seeker can just sign up with the Buddhists, read some books, embrace some new concepts and slam her to the mat might be a bit on the naive side.

On the other hand, why not? How'd this get so turned around? It's just truth. Shouldn't truth be, like, the simplest thing? Shouldn't someone who wants to find something as ubiquitous as truth be able to

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do so? And here's this venerable organization supposedly dedicated to just that very thing, even named for it, so what's the problem?

::: Why doesn't Buddhism produce Buddhas?

The problem arises from the fact that Buddhists, like everyone else, insist on reconciling the irreconcilable. They don't just want to awaken to the true, they also want to make sense of the untrue. They want to have their cake and eat it too, so they end up with nonsensical theories, divergent schools, sagacious doubletalk, and zero Buddhas.

Typical of Buddhist insistence on reconciling the irreconcilable is the concept of Two Truths, a poignant two-word joke they don't seem to get, and yet this sort of perversely irrational thinking is at the very

heart of the failed search for truth. We don't want truth, we want a particular truth; one that doesn't threaten ego, one that doesn't exist. We insist on a truth that makes sense given what we know, not knowing that we don't know anything.

Nothing about Buddhism is more revealing than the Four Noble Truths which, not being true, are of pretty dubious nobility. They form the basis of Buddhism, so it's clear from the outset that the Buddhists have whipped up a proprietary version of truth shaped more by market forces than any particular concern for the less consumer-friendly, albeit true, truth.

Yes, Buddhism may be spiritually filling, even nourishing, but insofar as truth is concerned, it's junkfood. You can eat it every day of your life and die exactly as Awakened as the day you signed up.

::: Bait & Switch

Buddhism is a classic bait-and-switch operation. We're attracted by the enlightenment in the window, but as soon as we're in the door they start steering us over to the compassion aisle. Buddhists could be honest and change their name to Compassionism, but who wants that?

There's the rub. They can't sell compassion and they can't deliver enlightenment.

This untruth-in-advertising is the kind of game you have to play if you want to stay successful in a business where the customer is always wrong. You can either go out of business honestly, or thrive by giving the people what they want. What they say they want and what they really want, though, are two very different things.

::: Me Me Me

To the outside observer, much of Buddhist knowledge and practice seems focused on spiritual self-improvement. This, too, is hard to speak against... except within the context of awakening from delusion. Then it's easy.

There is no such thing as true self, so any pursuit geared toward its aggrandizement, betterment,

upliftment, elevation, evolution, glorification, salvation, etc, is utter folly. How much more so any endeavor undertaken merely to increase one's own happiness or contentment or, I'm embarrassed to even say it, bliss?

Self is ego and ego is the realm of the dreamstate. If you want to break free of the dreamstate, you must break free of self, not stroke it to make it purr or groom it for some imagined brighter future.

::: Maya's House of Enlightenment

The trick with being critical of so esteemed and beloved an institution is not to get dragged down into the morass of details and debate. It's very simple: If Buddhism is about enlightenment, people should be getting enlightened. If it's not about enlightenment, they should change the sign.

Of course, Buddhism isn't completely unique in its survival tactics. This same gulf between promise and performance is found in all systems of human spirituality. We're looking at it in Buddhism because that's where it's most pronounced. No disrespect to the Buddha is intended. If there was a Buddha and he was enlightened, then it's Buddhism that insults his memory, not healthy skepticism. Blame the

naked emperor's retinue of tailors and lickspittles, not the boy who merely states the obvious.

Buddhism is arguably the most elevated of man's great belief systems. If you want to enjoy the many valuable benefits it has to offer, then I wouldn't presume to utter a syllable against it. But if you want to escape from the clutches of Maya, then I suggest you take a very close look at the serene face on all those golden statues to see if it isn't really hers.

–Jed McKenna

::: About the Author "Jed McKenna is an American original." –Lama Surya Das Jed McKenna is the author of "Spiritual Enlightenment: The Damnedest Thing" and "Spiritually Incorrect Enlightenment", published by Wisefool Press. Coming in 2005: "Spirituality X" and "Jed McKenna's Notebook". Visit WisefoolPress.com to learn more.

Types Of Buddhism

By Tony Ha

There are two types of Buddhas. And both seemingly reach a level of enlightenment called Nirvana, the end of suffering (while still alive here on Earth) and acquire some supernatural powers. This is a brief about both types of Buddhas.

In the Pali Canon, a collection of 16 volumes containing 12,800 pages of translation about communications about the study of Buddha Dharma's ideology / spirituality, the transcripts reference two types of Buddhas. These are Samyaksambuddha or Sammasambuddha and Pratyeka Buddha or Paccekabuddha. A brief description of each follows.

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Samyaksambuddhas (Pali: Sammasambuddha) Students of this order reach Buddhahood. Then they teach other people about the truth or enlightenment of Buddha Dharma and teaching his methodology / philosophy / ideology / religion, guiding them to a sense of spiritual awakening. Siddhartha Gautama, referred to as The Historical Buddha, fits in this category type, described as a Samyak-sambuddha.

Pratyekabuddhas (Pali: Paccekabuddha) Somewhat similar to the Samyaksambuddhas above in that they reach the state of Nirvana with powers, this type of Buddha is also known as Silent Buddhas, because they decided to not share their knowledge with others.

Disciples of a Sammasambuddha are called Savakas (hearers or followers) or Arahants (Noble One). These terms have slightly varied meanings but can all be used to describe the enlightened disciple. Anubuddha is a rarely used term, but was used by the Buddha in the Khuddakapatha as to those who become Buddhas after being given instruction. Enlightened disciples attain Nirvana and Parinirvana as the two types of Buddhas do. The most generally used term for them is Arahant.

One 12th century Theravadin commentary uses the term Savakabuddha to describe the enlightened disciple. According to this scripture there are 3 types of Buddhas. In this case, however, the common definition of the meaning of the word Buddha (as one who discovers the Dhamma without a teacher) does not apply any more. Mainstream Theravadin and Mahayana scriptures do not recognize this term and state there are only two kinds of Buddha.

Tony Ha is a freelance writer who writes about buddhism. He loves to reads about buddhism at

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