

# Buddhist Spirituality and Interfaith Dialogue

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## Abstract

In this paper, my attempt is to discuss about the Buddhist spirituality in connection with interfaith dialogue. If no concept of ‘spirit’ is in Buddhism, then how can there be the Buddhist spirituality. If the spirituality means the way of religious life, then there is the Buddhist spirituality. To have the Buddhist spirit or real Buddhist is to observe the morality and practice Insight Meditation. The real followers of any religions can associate with any other religious followers. This is because all religions teach people to be good by having co-existence with others peacefully. To do dialogue with others is to live with each peacefully, to do social services together with other religious followers, to study the teaching of other religions, and to observe the way of religious practices of other religious followers.

**Keywords :** Spirituality, Buddhist Spirituality, Interfaith Dialogue

## Introduction

### What is Buddhism ?

Buddhism is the English term for the teaching of the Buddha or the religion found by him. In its original name it is known as dhamma-Vinaya or Buddha-Sasana in Thailand. Actually, the word ‘Buddha’ is not his name, but it is a title, meaning the Enlightened One or the Awakened One; the bearer of Nibbana, the highest goal in Buddhism. His disciple and people called him ‘Buddha’, when he attained or discovered the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha’s personal name was Siddhattha and his clan name was Godtama. Thus he was sometimes called Siddhattha Gotama or Gotame Buddha. He was born as a prince of the Sakyan kingdom in North India in 623 B.C., at present that city is known as Nepal. As a prince, he led the happy life and married princess

Yasodhara, who born him a son named Rahula, who later became a novice and attained Nibbana.

When the Buddha was known as *Siddhattha* at the age of twenty-nine, he left the worldly life even his wife and son, wandering as an ascetic, for the purpose of finding some way of extinction of suffering in his life and fellow-beings. After six years of his experiment, he realized that asceticism did not lead to wisdom, he then decided to go on his own way, which is the Middle Way by applying the reflective thought of conscious meditation. He finally attained the Enlightenment of the 'Four Noble Truths' (*caturariyasacca*), which are nothing but the doctrine of 'Dependent Origination' (*paticcasamuppada*), in other words known as the 'Three Common Characteristics' (*tilakkhana*). In short, it is called 'heedfulness' (*appamada*), in which all kinds of *Dharma* are included. Then he was known as the greatest man or the 'Sammāsambuddha' (who knows dhamma by himself), because of the perfection in his humanness. From then through the remaining 45 years of his life, he wandered from place to place teaching his dhamma to all who would listen to him and organizing his followers who renounced the layman life to form the Sangha. He died peacefully at the age of 80. When asked who would be the teacher after his passing away, he told the Monks that they would not be left without the teacher, for the doctrines and disciplines that the Buddha had taught them would be their teacher, when the Buddha was gone. At present Buddhism spread all over the world. Living Buddhism is divided into 2 broad traditions:<sup>1</sup>

1. The first one is called *Theravada* (Elders' words) Buddhism, which is also known as 'southern' Buddhism or Hinayana (small vehicle in the sense of being a conservative school) followed by over 100 million in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Its canonical scriptures are preserved in Pali, an ancient Indian language closely related to Sanskrit. The school exemplifies certain conservatism. Relative to the other two traditions, it can be regarded as generally closer in doctrine and practice to ancient Buddhism as it existed in the early centuries BCE in India.

<sup>1</sup> Spirituality is derived from the Latin word *spiritus*, spirit, the essential part of the person.

2. The second one is called *Acariyavada* (later teachers' words) Buddhism, which is known as Mahayana (great vehicle in the sense of being a liberal school) Buddhism. Acariyavada or Mahayana Buddhism is further divided into 2 lines as follows:

(1) One is known also as 'eastern' Buddhism and followed by 500 to 1,000 million in the East Asian tradition of China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Its scriptures are preserved in Sanskrit and Chinese. East and North Asian Buddhism is extremely diverse; it has coexisted with Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, and, more recently but less happily, Communism.

(2) The other one is known as 'northern' Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism and followed by over 20 million in the Tibetan tradition. Its scriptures are preserved in Tibetan and once more its outlook is broadly that of the eastern Mahayana, but its more specific orientation is that of the 'Vehicle of the Diamond Thunderbolt' (*vajra-yana*), also known as Tantric Buddhism.

### Three Phases of Buddhism

The Buddha's teachings can be classified into **three phases**, viz.: **Reformation or reinterpretation, revolution and reconstruction.**

1. **In the phase of *reformation*,** the Buddha rejected the caste-system, the immolation-sacrifice and so on. The Buddha was perfectly aware of the social, political, religious, economic and educational situations prevailing in India at the time of his birth and Enlightenment. Although he was born in a royal family, he by *self-sacrifice* renounced the world being moved by human suffering. Inequalities in the social order led to various forms of suffering like exploitation, untouchability, corruption and immorality of the ruling class. The priests and the Brahmins took advantages of their superior positions. Education was denied to the majority of the people. In this respect, Buddhism eradicated inequalities and established human dignity. It came into being not to destroy the old social order, but for the sake of reforming it.

It is well-known that Buddhism has been opposed to the 'caste-system' as the most corrupting element in human society. The Buddha found that caste had

nothing to do with one's capacity. It is said that the caste-system had become quite rigid at the time of the Buddha and he, being compassionate, gave succors to the down-trodden.

What the Buddha did is not to abolish altogether such old ideas, but to give them new meaning or importance. For instance, Brahmanism holds that a person could be a Brahmin only when he was born of parents belonging to the Brahmin caste. The Buddha did not deny in any way that there were Brahmins in the world, but according to him a person could be called 'Brahmin' only because of his virtue (*Dharma* or *karma*) and not because of his birth (*jati*).

Besides, the women's emancipation (*vimutti*) had an important place in Buddhism. Women are admitted to the *Sangha* on an equal basis along with men. Both men and women have equal rights. The first female monk (*bhikkhuni*) in Buddhism is known as Pajabodigotami, who is actually the Buddha's stepped mother.

The Buddha also repudiates the efficacy of ceremonies and sacrifices. It is said that at the time of the Buddha the cruel practice of human sacrifice was also perhaps prevalent and the Buddha was opposed all kinds of bloodshed in the name of religion. The Buddha said that he himself did not condemn all kinds of sacrifice, nor did he approve of all of them. He rejected an immolation- sacrifice in which many kinds of animals were killed. But he was in favor of a sacrifice in which the blood was not shed. He taught people to perform non-violent sacrifices such as regular charity, observing five precepts, and so on. In rejecting sacrifice the Buddha teaches that self- sacrifice is more powerful than all ritualistic sacrifices. In the *Kutadanta Sutta*, (DN,I,127), the Buddha elaborated to a Brahmin named Kutadanta the Buddhist way of performing sacrifice from the lowest to the highest, in which not even a single animal life was taken. With regard to the immolation-sacrifice, the Buddha overtly pointed out the wrong ideas of the person who performed it. He said that in such a sacrifice the person acted contrary to his wish. Thinking of doing good, he did evil, and thinking of ascending the path leading to the heaven, he descended the path leading to hell. Therefore, self-sacrifice is more praiseworthy than any other sacrifices.

2. In **the revolutionary phase**, the Buddha brought about a total and radical change in some respect in the traditional beliefs. The doctrine of 'permanent self' (*Atman*), for example, was rejected and replaced by the doctrine of 'non-self' (*Anatta*), the Hindu yoga by Insight meditation, and sensual indulgence and self-mortification by the Middle Path.

The Buddha strongly condemned the religious austerity which was a common practice among the Brahmanas and the Jains. The Buddha denounced 'self-mortification' (*attakilamathanuyoga*) as equally unworthy and unprofitable. He recommended simple life and strict self-restraint. He was also disgusted with the 'sensual indulgence' (*kamasukhallikanuyoga*) which prevailed in India at that time. A man who can control sexual enjoyment is regarded as a noble and strong man by the Buddha. According to a Greek philosopher, virtue always lies between the two extremes: Courage between cowardice and foolhardiness, and liberality between prodigality and illiberality, so also the Buddha finds virtue in the 'Middle Way' (*Majjhima Patipada*). By avoiding the two extremes the Buddha has gained perfect knowledge of the Middle Path to *Nirvana*.

And it should be mentioned here that the Buddha declares the Middle Path for the purpose of celibate life of his disciples, he never craves after reputation or greatness or nobility of character. Here the Buddha's declaration of following the Middle Path between the two extremes is very well-known to everybody. Buddhism denies all kinds of permanent souls (*atman*), but accepts the doctrine of *Anatta*, which is based on the analysis of the five *khandhas* in the *Anattalakkhana-Sutta*, (DN II 100). The denial of the soul is said to be opposed to the doctrine of *Atta*, which is propounded by the Upanisadic thinkers, who believe that the soul is "autonomous", that it is the "inner controller of name and form." The Buddha asserts that what is apprehended as "self" or "*Atman*" is only an illusion deriving from the combination of the five *khandhas*. The so-called five *khandhas* are sometimes called the 'five groups of attachment' (*pancuppadanakkhandha*), which cannot be regarded as a permanent soul or self, for each of them falls into the common characteristics of 'impermanence' (*anicca*), 'oppression' (*dukkha*), and 'not-self' (*anatta*).

On the other hand, when man is mentioned by the terms *ayatana* 'sense-fields' and *dhatu* 'elements,' he is to be analysed on the basis of his physical and mental environment. The doctrine of *Atman* is, therefore, superseded by the doctrine of *Anatta*. The basic problem of Buddhism is concerned with human suffering. The Buddha's teachings highlight the problems of suffering in various forms. Sickness is one of these. It is said that as long as a man is alive, he is subject to sickness (*payāḍhi*) and old age (*jara*). One has to find an abiding solution to these problems. When the Buddha considered sickness as a philosophical problem, we are reminded of Søren Kierkegaard, who found sickness to be a stark reminder of one's existence. What Kierkegaard analysed and understood as a basic problem of human existence, was highlighted by the Buddha 2500 years before him.

3. **In the aspect of *reconstruction*,** which is the most important among them, the Buddha discovers a new 'truth' (*sacca*) called the Four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination, 24 relations and so on.

The doctrine of the Four Noble Truths enumerated by the Buddha in his first sermon known as *Dhammacakkappavattana-Sutta* at the Deer Park near the city of Varanasi is regarded as the most basic one, profound as well as original for the revelation of which he deserves to be called the Buddha. It is apparent that the Four Noble Truths are nothing but the gradual self-development with the aim of breaking away from the *karma* and *samsara* to the state of *Nirvana*. The Buddha declared that he would not have claimed himself to be the 'All-Enlightened One' (*sammāsambuddha*) if the three phases of realization, each embracing all the Four Noble Truths, had not dawned on him. They are: The knowledge of the Four Noble Truths (*saccanana*), the knowledge of the duties to be done about them (*kiccanana*), and the knowledge that those duties have been done (*katanana*).

Buddhism is a religion of reason as well as of salvation. Whatever is found in reason and is in accordance with objective truth, no matter who stated it, was never rejected by the Buddha.

## Buddhist Spirituality as Appeared in the Scriptures

It is said that a person can be religious but not leading a spiritual life. On the other hand, a person can be spiritual but not necessarily religious. Contemplativeness and self-reflectiveness are hallmarks of spirituality. Religion, however, is an institutional (and thus primarily material) phenomenon and unlike spirituality. Religions are differentiated by particular beliefs and practices, requirements of membership, and modes of social organization. They are also characterized by other non-spiritual concerns and goals (e.g., cultural, economic, political, social). Thus, religion can be seen as fundamentally a social phenomenon, whereas spirituality (like health, personality and so on) is usually understood at the level of the individual within specific contexts (Richards & Bergin, 1997; Thoresen, 1998).

In general, to be “*spiritual*”, there are four *practices* interrelated factors<sup>2</sup>. (1) A relationship *practice* or practical belief with the transcendent, generally seen as both immanent and transcendental. This relationship is focused on trust, surrender, and submission. (2) A mental *practice*, either regular meditation or some type of prayer (but not prayer where the goal is to ask for particular products or for the train to come quicker). (3) A *physical practice* to transform or harmonize the body - yoga, tai chi, and other similar practices. (4) Social *practice* - a relationship with the community, global, or local, a caring for others. (Inayatullah, 2005). The relationship between Spirituality and Buddhism and its significant in interfaith dialogue issue will be explored in here to some extent.

### The Spirit of Buddhism

As a religion, Buddhism has a number of different aspects such as truth, art, culture, philosophy and so on, just as the same mountain when viewed from different directions presents different appearances. But of all these various aspects, the only one that the real Buddhists should pay more attention to is “Buddhism as a religion”. It is essentially concerned with all the human problems and their solutions. From the aspect of morality, Buddhism is a religion of action and not of mere belief. It can be measured only by experience and not by any argument. The chief purpose of

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<sup>2</sup> Spirituality is derived from the Latin word spiritus, spirit, the essential part of the person.

Buddhism is to know things as they are. This essentially implies the fact that the Buddha is purified and perfect with what is called the 'Three Trainings' (*tisikkhas*) of 'morality' (*sila*), 'concentration' (*samadhi*), and 'wisdom' (*panna*), and the 'Three Buddha's Conducts' (*Buddhacariya*) of the 'well-being of the world', 'the benefit of his kith and kin,' and 'the beneficial conduct as duty of the Buddha,' (DhA.III,441).

### The Unique Characteristics of Buddhism

**1. Identity of Buddhism** Buddhism has so far persisted for 2558 years and has undergone various changes. Hence Buddhism is divided into two main branches, namely Theravada and Mahayana.

Although there are some differences in their external practices such as rituals and ceremonies, but the two schools of Buddhism try to maintain the following main teaching of the Buddha. They are: (1) The belief in the Triple Gem: The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha or Disciples. (2) The belief in the Three Characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self. (3) The belief in Doctrine of Dependent Origination and Nibbana. (4) The belief in the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth. (5) The belief in the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Noble Paths. (6) The analysis of Man into the Five Aggregates and Twelve Bases. These basic teachings are regarded as common features that mark the identity between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

Differences are there in the two main schools of Buddhism, to mention a few they are the following concepts of Bodhisatva, Three Bodies of the Buddha (Trikaya) and so on (Ferguson, 2010, p.111).

### 2. Specific Two teachings of Buddhism

The teachings peculiar to Buddhism are the concepts of 'non-self' (*anatta*) and 'insight meditation' (*vipassana*).

**2.1. Non-self (Anatta):** Buddhism is particularly known as *Religion of Selflessness* apart from its prominent facets explained above. Of all the major religions in the world, Buddhism is the only religion that preaches the doctrine of 'non-self' (*anatta*) in Theravada Buddhism or 'emptiness' (*sunyata*) in Mahayana Buddhism. This doctrine is one of the main cornerstones upon which Buddhism is built. In the commentary, the Buddha's discovery of non-self is confirmed thus: "whether the Buddhas arise in the world or not, the characteristics of impermanence and

suffering becomes known to man, But the characteristic of non-self will not be known to man unless the Buddhas arise in the world,” (*Sumangalavilasini*, II, 55). The Buddha’s reasons for denying the self are centred on the analysis of nature of man.

**What is the true idea of man in Buddhism?** The most apt reply is that man is ‘a psycho-physical complex’ (*nama-rupa*) conditioned and determined by what is called an antecedent state in the process of ‘becoming’ (*bhava*) in which both action (*karma*) and reaction (*karmaphala*) play an essential part in the development of personality. On the other hand, man as perceived from within and without, is analyzed into a collection of ‘five aggregates’ (*pancakkhandha*) of changing elements, namely, the group of his looks, sentiments, perceptive outfit, mental pre-dispositions, and acts of consciousness such as remembering, thinking and so on. The first group is called ‘matter’, as named earlier, but the last four are together termed ‘mind’, and they are collectively called *nama-rupa*. There is another classification of the elements of man, which is divided into two groups of cognitive faculties and of the different categories of the objects. The two groups are called ‘bases’ (*ayatana*s), which are of twelve kinds in number, divided into six cognitive faculties known as ‘six internal bases’ and six categories of corresponding objects known as ‘six external bases’. The internal bases are also regarded as receptive faculties and the external ones are objects. These twelve bases, both internal and external, are sufficient for the formulation of the idea of man.

Buddhism regards man’s life in its reality as composed of the groups of the constituents, say, “five aggregates”: “When certain things of their various parts combined, we speak of ‘chariot’ or ‘car’, just so when these five aggregates are there, we use the designation ‘man’ or ‘being’, (SN,I,135). Generally speaking, the purpose of analysis is to enrich the understanding of man about what he is not, technically called non-self. It may be noted here that the five aggregates are just classificatory groupings; they should not be conceived as compact entities (heaps or bundles), for actually only single representative of these groups, mostly variable, can arise with any state of consciousness. The five aggregates are frequently mentioned with the eighteen elements and twelve senses bases.

The explanation of man according to the Four Noble Truths should be brought into consideration here. Among the Four Noble Truths, the first truth called suffering is the nucleus around which the remaining truths assemble. The first truth implies all the problems of life comprising birth, old age, disease, death, despair and so on. In short, anything that exists, including the five *khandhas* and twelve *ayatana*s, is suffering. Buddhism regards the five *khandhas* themselves as suffering. They are like a burden: it means that life is a burden. To be is to suffer and the way out would consist in going out of the existence. Suffering is thus the essence as well as the destiny of man. The most important factor of the miserable condition is inherent impermanence (*anicca*) of man and things. When the existence is impermanent, then there is nothing called permanent soul or self, there is only becoming (*bhava*). It is said that this replacement of the *Upanisadic* idea of Being by that of Becoming and the view of the universe as uninterrupted and ununified stream of momentary particulars is the distinct contribution of Buddhism to Indian thought. The second truth affirms that there is a cause of suffering called ignorance (*avijja*) that makes man cling to the sense of his ego and through it to the world by not knowing things as they really are. This truth includes the law of cause and effect (*paticcasamuppada*) and the immutable law of *karma* and rebirth. And by stopping the operation of the cause of suffering, it is possible, as affirmed by the third truth, to uproot suffering. This truth indicates the law of *Patichcasamuppada* in the aspect of the Dependent Cessation, otherwise called *Nirvana*. The fourth truth delineates the method one has to adopt in order to achieve complete freedom from suffering. When the ignorance is uprooted, one becomes a perfected man or *Arahant*. This truth suggests the way of life called the Middle Way (*Majjhima* *patipada*), comprising the eight constituents of the Noble Path. And they are further organized into the 'Threefold Training' (*tisikkha*) as a short practical way.

**Human Nature According To Buddhism:** Buddhism regards the human being as superior to all. The human being is entirely different from other animals in respect of mentality that is somewhat complicated. It is like dense forest that has no entrance and is difficult to penetrate, in comparison with the nature of an animal, which is much easier to understand. The Buddha realizes that man, while being tempted to perform evil actions, could be properly directed towards the performance of good

actions (*kusalakamma*). According to Buddhism, there are three 'immoral roots' (*akusalamula*), namely, lust (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*), which are regarded as the original cause of ignorance (*avijja*). It is, therefore, said that the real nature of an ordinary man is always entangled with the impurities (*kilesas*) and worldly pleasures and he is always guided by ignorance. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha said: "Oh! wise man, it is true that not easy to control are evil things, do not let greed and weakness drag you to prolonged suffering," (Dh,v.248).

The nature of man can be generally classified in accordance with four outstanding differences. Firstly, there are those who, because of wrong teachings, practise austerities and cause themselves to suffer. Secondly, there are those who, by cruelty, by stealing, by killing or by other unkind acts, cause others to suffer. Thirdly, there are those who cause others to suffer along with themselves. Lastly, there are those who do not suffer themselves and save others from suffering. The last category is highly recommended by the Buddha as they do not give way to greed, anger or foolishness, but live peaceful life which is full of kindness and wisdom.

According to the Buddha, good or evils are to be considered as two aspects of human nature, and man usually performs either wholesome or unwholesome *karmas*, because of the conflict of the two aspects as already mentioned. Hence in the *Anguttara-Nikaya*, (AN,I,93) the Buddha classifies human beings into four kinds: (1) Some come from darkness but will only go to darkness, (ii) Some come from darkness but will go to light, (iii) some come from light but will go to darkness, (iv) some come from light and they will go to light. The Buddha appreciates the last one as it signifies one of not only noble birth, but also of good conduct. Such a person will never suffer in this life and in the life to come.

In support of doing good, avoiding evil and purifying one's mind, (DN,II,49), the Buddha preached the Middle Path as the criterion of the best man. "The tamed is the best among men - *danto settho manussesu*," (Dh,v.321). The best man in Buddhism is identified by these five characteristics, namely, being not credulous, knowing the uncreated, having severed all ties, having put an end to opportunity and having removed all desires. The first is that the best man ascertains everything before believing. Secondly, he knows *Nirvana*. Thirdly, he destroys *samsara*. Fourthly, he has no chance to do

both good and evil. Finally, he has no defilements to hope for anything. If one conquers just oneself, one is, indeed, the greatest victor, (Dh,v.103). The Buddha with his clear insight understands the human nature and the conduct leading to be a perfect man. In short, man is defined by his actions - what he did, what he is doing, and what he will do; so his nature is conditioned by his own action or kamma. In short, the main purpose of the Buddha's denial of the self is to enable his disciples to shed the grasping of the self. So long as grasping of the self in any forms persists, there can be no real liberation.

**2.2. Insight Meditation:** The insight meditation must be accumulated gradually from observing precepts, practicing concentration and then developing insight meditation. The three steps are called the (i) morality or precept, (ii) concentration or tranquillity meditation, and (iii) wisdom or insight meditation. The three steps called the Threefold Training must be followed continuously. The proper practice of these three domains leads one to the extinction of wheel of life and to the state of noble man.

1. The Morality: Morality, in the sense of moral conduct, is broadly classified under two categories: (i) for the members of the Monastic Order (*Sangha*), and (ii) for general people. As regards the first category, it is divided into three groups: (i) The rules for monks consist of two hundred and twenty-seven rules, (ii) there are three hundred and eleven rules for female monks, and (iii) there are ten rules for male and female novices. This is a brief mention of the first category. With regard to the second category, it refers to two groups: (i) five precepts are laid down for male and female followers, and (ii) eight precepts, which are advised to observe on the full moon day and waxing and waning half moon day.

The point to be emphasized is that there are five precepts, which are regarded as human virtues and that a person who possessed the five precepts is called a virtuous disciple. The virtuous man must refrain from killing, stealing, committing adultery, telling a lie and taking intoxicating drinks. If one makes malpractice of these, then one exterminated the roots of one's manhood. A man who does not shun these evils has no morality, indeed, and after death he will fall to the deepest hell. The very least result of killing is the shortening of one's life, that of stealing is loss of one's

wealth, that of sexual misconduct is breeding rivalry and hate, that of telling lies is being falsely accused and that of hot drinks is being afflicted with insanity. "Though Buddhism condemns the destruction of animal life as a thorough evil, it nevertheless does not hold the belief that under all circumstances also the partaking of meat is an immoral act," says Nyanatiloka. The Buddha himself says that a man becomes impure not because of taking fish or meat but because of greed, hate and delusion. He maintains that 'meat can be used under three conditions, when it is not seen, heard and suspected to have been killed especially for oneself.' The Buddha once refused Devadatta who asked him to introduce vegetarianism among monks by suggesting that it was upto them to lead a vegetarian or non-vegetarian life according to their own convenience.

2. Concentration: In general, concentration means one-pointedness of mind. Concentration characterizes the one pointed- ness of mind and it is the bliss, the peace and the power of mind. A person whose work is supported by the strength of *concentration* can work more and better. A student whose mind is peaceful can master the subject in short time. The meditator has to choose the theme of concentration suitable to his temperament. The theme of concentration are classified into forty kinds to suit the temperaments of the meditator. The concentration meditation will lead one to the tranquillity of mind only.

3. Wisdom: Wisdom or understanding means knowledge and insight of the real nature of things. It is the understanding of things as they really are. This is the final step of *Buddhism*, for only wisdom can penetrate and eliminated the root cause of life called desire and ignorance, while in observing precepts the coarse type of defilement is eradicated, and in practicing concentration, the more subtle type of defilement is eliminated. Therefore, wisdom is regarded as penetrative knowledge (see appendix). The training in higher wisdom means the development of wisdom to penetrate into suffering, its origination, its extinction and the path leading to its extinction. There are two main kinds of insight meditation as under: 1. Tranquillity Leading to Insight: According to this process, mind becomes one- pointed at the outset with the potentiality of some objects of meditation. 2. the Insight Leading to Tranquillity: According to this

process, first of all the meditator depending on wisdom considers the nature of things in respect of impermanence, and so on. Then his mind, released from the mental-objects, becomes one-pointed providing an insight into the Noble Path.

### **Buddhist Spirituality in Dialogue with other Religious Spiritualities**

Buddhism is ready to open for dialogue to any world religions. Because dialogue for the Buddhists is an activity known in Buddhist context as dhamma discussion. In the Buddha's time the Buddhists were encouraged to perform dhamma discussion among themselves and among the Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Buddhists can collaborate with Christian in various types of dialogue, provided that it must be done out of the sense of sincerity.<sup>3</sup> The spirit of dialogue which included the principles of reverence, tolerance, understanding, and freedom, is evident in the dialogue of the Buddha and King Asoka's attitude to other religions. In the Asoka's time, one finds a happy combination of openness to other faiths and commitment of one's own faith; a willingness to promote what is the best in other faiths and a passion to propagate

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<sup>3</sup> There are 10 basic ground rules of inter-religious dialogue as follows: 1) the primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly; 2) inter-religious dialogue must be a two-sided project within each religious community and between religious community; 3) each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity; 4) each participant must assume a similar complete honest and sincerity in the other partners; 5) each participant must define oneself, say for example, the Buddhist can define from the inside what it means to be a Buddhist; 6) each participant must come to the dialogue with no fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are; 7) dialogue can take place only between equals, for example, each side should not view each other as superior or inferior; 8) dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust; 9) person entering into inter-religious dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and one own tradition; and 10) each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion from within. John Dunne speaks of 'passing over' into another's religious experience and then coming back broadened and deepened. See Jutakarn Yothasamuthr, *Inter-Religious Relations: A Comparative Study of Buddhism and Islam in Bangkok, Thailand* (Bangkok: Midol University, 2002), p.74. See also Whalen Lai & Michael Von Bruck, *Christianity and Buddhism* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001).

one's own faith. As it is written his Rock Edict XII thus: "King Piyadarsi honors men of all faiths....The faith of others all deserved to be honored for one reason and another. By honoring them, one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to the faith of others. ...For if a man extols his own faith and disparages another because of devotion to his own and because he wants to glorify it, he seriously injures his own faith. Therefore, concord alone is commendable, for through concord men may learn and respect the conception of dhamma accepted by others."

There is a general agreement that dialogue of life and action oriented dialogue are most desirable in a situation of religious pluralism, for the purpose of mutual understanding, and enrichment, for dispelling suspicion and prejudices, for harnessing moral and spiritual values to eradicate social evil, and for promoting social justice.<sup>4</sup>

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the modern thinker of Thai Buddhism, cautions us to not cling too much to mere names of our religions for fear of being an obstacle for mutual understanding, as he puts it thus:

"The ordinary, ignorant worldly person is under the impression that there are many religions and that they are all different to the extent of being hostile and opposed. Thus one considers Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism as incompatible and even bitter enemies. Such is the conception of the common person who speaks according to the impressions held by common people. If, however, a person has penetrated to the fundamental nature (dhamma) of religion, he will regard all religions as essentially similar. Although he may say there is Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and so on, he will also say that essentially they are all the same. If he should go to a deeper understanding of dhamma until finally he realizes the absolute truth, he would discover that there is no such thing called religion, that there is no Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam." (Buddhadasa, 1989, p.146)

Clinging to only names of one's own religion without understanding the truth inside finally and unavoidably leads to religious conflict.

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<sup>4</sup> utakarn Yothasamuthr, op.cit., p. 40.

According to Buddhadasa, one can be a good Buddhist and a good follower of other religions, such as Islam and Christianity, at the same time. Why did he say so? Donald Swearer in the admiration of Buddhadasa's pioneering mission of dialogue wrote: "The thought-provoking nature of Buddhadasa's point of view is suggested by the titles of his talks—"No Religion" [ไม่มีศาสนา = Mai Mi Sasana], "A Good Buddhist Should be a Good Christian" [ชาวพุทธที่ดียอมเป็นชาวคริสต์ที่ดี = Chaw Phut Thi Di Yom Pen Khrit Thi Di] to name only two. Buddhadasa's purpose was to encourage both Buddhist and Christians to recover the deepest principles of their religions, to delve beyond the other, superficial coverings that hide the true core, and in doing so to discover a common ground. For Buddhadasa this enterprise was nothing less than discovering the truth about the nature of things (saccadhamma) (Swearer, 2004). I further Buddhadasa's idea thus: A good Buddhist should be a good Muslim.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, through the Insight Meditation, the Buddhist can understand himself/herself in the real sense of Buddhism. The spirituality of being a Buddhist can be revealed through the process of practicing the insight meditation. That life is essential for all living beings must be conscious by the Buddhist, so he should cultivate loving kindness (metta) to others. Charity (dana) is to be performed to be an antidote of greed in others' property. To practice the contentment of one own life-partner is to observe the non-sexual misconduct. To abstain from the wrong speech is to put into practice the right word. Finally, to cultivate mindfulness is to avoid from drinking intoxicants. Five precepts and their counterparts of five virtues must be lived by the Buddhists.

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