

# Interreligious Dialogue Skills Training for Peaceful Coexistence: A Buddhist Contribution

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## ABSTRACT

Interreligious dialogue (ID) has been recognized as an important tool for peacebuilding in multi-religious communities. However, its practice has faced many problems and challenges due to various factors such as misunderstanding, skepticism, high level of sensitivity, and lack of dialogical skills. The paper proposes that ID competency training should be part of general education at school and university level to prepare young people's capacity for building a peaceful multireligious society. In Canada, this type of education was actualized in 2008 through the Quebec education program "Ethics and Religious Culture" (ERC) to develop dialogue skills for school students. Such a program is not yet widely institutionalized in general education systems in Asia. This study applies the Quebec ERC framework to study the Buddha's dialogue skills in the Buddhist scripture – the Suttanta Pitaka by using qualitative content analysis (QCA). There are various skill sets to be developed according to the ERC model. However, this paper will focus on the skill of how to examine a point of view including 4 types of view: judgment of preference, judgment of prescription, judgment of reality and judgment of value. The findings show that Buddhist resources can enrich the ERC framework and function as one of valuable resources for ID competency education. Particularly, while the ERC framework gives some guidelines on how to examine each type of view, it does not provide concrete standards for judging it. In contrast, the Buddhist framework provides concrete standards and frameworks for examining and evaluating different religious views. Concrete frameworks and criteria can enhance rational discussion of religious views for mutual understanding.

**Keywords:** Interreligious dialogue, Suttanta Pitaka, Buddha's dialogue skills, Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC)

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## Introduction

Interreligious dialogue (ID) has existed since ancient times. Scriptures from various religious traditions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are replete with accounts of dialogue. Today, peace scholars and practitioners have argued that ID is an important tool for building a peaceful pluralistic community (Asghar-Zadeh, 2019, p. 58; Merdjanova and Brodeur, 2009, p. 36; Smock, 2002, 131). Leonard Swidler even sees dialogue as a matter of life and death for building a peaceful world today (Swidler, 2000, p. 32).

Having said that, the practice of ID has been difficult and challenging, especially for intellectual type of dialogue. Scholarly studies of the topic have described various challenges such as misunderstanding, skepticism, high level of sensitivity, and lack of dialogical skills. Some ID scholars have admitted that this type of dialogue is not easy and even dangerous (Cilliers, 2002, p. 47; Ingram, 1986, pp. 91–92; Ochs, 2015, p. 488). Therefore, this paper argues for the need of ID skills training to prepare people for an effective dialogue. This training should be made part of general education at school and university level so that young people can acquire ID capacity to build a harmonious community with people of different religions and worldviews. This type of educational program has not been found in Asia which is the cradle of many major world religions.

Nevertheless, this type of dialogue skills education was introduced in Quebec, Canada, in 2008 through the program “Ethics and Religious Culture” (ERC) for primary and secondary school students (*Quebec Education Program “Ethics and Religious Culture,”* 2008). One of the objectives of the program is to promote dialogical skills for fostering an open and tolerant community life in Quebec which is diverse in views and ways of life. The program aims to develop three competencies in students: the ability to reflect and organize their ideas, the ability to interact with others, and the ability to develop a substantiated point of view. Inspired by the ERC dialogue competency training model, this study applies this dialogue skills framework to study the Buddha’s dialogue skills in the Buddhist scripture - the *Suttanta Pitaka*.

The *Suttanta Pitaka* is a rich source of intellectual ID. The Buddha is portrayed as an ID expert who skillfully communicated with different types of people from different backgrounds in various situations. Many people including his rivals became transformed after a dialogue with the Buddha. Therefore, it is worth learning from the Buddha’s experiences and wisdom in order to enlighten the work of dialogue in our time and for building a peaceful dialogical society. In this paper, the author will focus on one dialogue skill in the ERC framework: the ability to develop a substantiated point of view. Four types of view are examined: judgment of preference, judgment of prescription, judgment of reality and judgment of value. The paper aims to identify the Buddha’s methods of examining a point of view in ID and extracts insights from comparing the ERC framework and the Buddhist framework on the studied issue for improved understanding of dialogue skills.

## Literature Review

### 1. Defining Interreligious Dialogue

There are different definitions of ID from broad to narrow ones. For example, Wesley Ariarajah and T.K. Thomas have a broad view of dialogue. They argue that “Dialogue is a way of life... Dialogue is unavoidable. It is inevitable. It is not planned; it simply happens. It is our way of life in Asia.” (Ariarajah & Thomas, 1986, pp. 3–4). In contrast, Leonard Swidler has a narrower understanding of dialogue. He states:

Dialogue is conversation between two or more people with different views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow... We enter into dialogue primarily so that we can learn, change and grow, not so that we can force change on the other... Dialogue is not debate. In dialogue, we must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as possible in an attempt to understand the other’s position as precisely as possible. (Swidler, 2000, p. 9)

In this study, based on the nature of the Buddha’s ID in the narratives recorded in the *Suttanta Pitaka*, ID has a broader understanding than that of Swidler because it includes not only conversation but also debate, consultation and others. The Buddha’s dialogue is not limited to a mutual exchange of religious beliefs for mutual understanding but it covers a wide range of issues of life such as resolving violent conflicts, doctrinal disputes, giving political advice to people of other faiths by using his Buddhist perspective. Therefore, ID in this study is defined as “verbal communication” between the Buddha and people of other faiths or views, in which the Buddha uses his Buddhist knowledge to address various issues raised in the dialogue.

### 2. The Buddha and His Dialogue Context

According to Theravada Buddhism, the Buddha was born in a royal family of a small state called Shakya at the foot of the Himalayas traditionally dated to 623 B.C.E. He was named Siddhartha Gautama. He belonged to the warrior caste. When he was 29, after seeing the 4 sights: an old person, a sick person, a corpse, and a recluse, he was awakened to the reality of suffering. He left his royal life and entered a renunciation life to seek liberation from suffering. He tried various religious practices including self-mortification for six years. Being dissatisfied with all these practices, he decided to find his own way. Under the Bodhi tree for 49 days and nights, he finally got supreme enlightenment and became a Buddha which means “the Enlightened One”. He then preached this excellent way of liberation from suffering or the Dhamma to all people without discrimination for the next forty-five years of his life on earth. The Buddha passed away at the age of eighty. He established four communities of practice including bhikkhu (ordained male monks), bhikkhuni (ordained female monks), laymen and laywomen. Many got enlightened as the Buddha did (Chandra-ngarm, 1999, pp. 35–41).

Concerning the dialogue context of the Buddha, according to A. P. de Zoysa, the Indian society during the Buddha’s time was highly tolerant and open for intellectual dialogue between people of different religious views and worldviews. Religious teachers

of different religious groups could freely move around, preach their views, debate and challenge other views through reasons and persuasion in public. There was no bloodshed or violence between religious groups. The public benefited much from these public debates. It was a golden time (de Zoysa, 1955, pp. 3–4). Based on the early Buddhist narratives, the Buddha's dialogue partners come from various backgrounds including the brahmins, the Niganthas or the Jains, the ascetic wanderers, political and army leaders, clan leaders, householders and others. They come to the Buddha for various purposes ranging from religious to social and political issues. The Buddha skillfully addresses their issues based on his enlightened knowledge.

Scholarly studies of the Buddha's ID have been few. Most of them frame the Buddha's attitude toward other religions according to the Western Christian paradigm: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism (Bodhi, 2020; Hayes, 1991; de Cea, 2013; Kiblinger, 2003, 2005; Schmidt-Leuikel, 2020). Some others explore dialogue-fostering values from Buddhism such as respect for different views, non-argumentative attitude, non-dogmatism, rationality, tolerance, openness, and loving kindness (Jayatilleke, 1987; Sek, 2017). These works are important for understanding Buddhist views and contributions to ID. Some of the Buddhist values mentioned above are relevant to dialogue skills such as "non-dogmatism", "openness", and "rationality". However, this area of practical dialogue skills has not been well studied in a systematic manner. Nor has any specific Buddhist framework for dialogue skills development been proposed. This study aims to fill in this gap by constructing a Buddhist framework for developing dialogue skills focusing on the skill of examining a point of view in dialogue. Particularly it explores the Buddha's methods of examining 4 types of view: judgment of preference, judgment of prescription, judgment of reality and judgment of value in his dialogues with people of other faiths in the Suttanta Pitaka by using the ERC dialogue skills framework.

### **3. The ERC Model of Dialogue Skills**

In September 2008, the Ministry of Education in Quebec, Canada, implemented a new education program called "Ethics and Religious Culture" (ERC) for primary and secondary school systems in order to prepare students for better living in an increasingly pluralistic society like the one in Quebec. The program aims to develop three competencies in students: the capacity to reflect on ethical questions, demonstrated understanding of religious phenomenon, and the capacity to engage in dialogue. For the third competency, three abilities are listed: the ability to reflect and organize their ideas, the ability to interact with others, and the ability to develop a substantiated point of view. Concretely, the students learn to get familiar to various forms of dialogue, ways to develop their point of view (description, explanation, justification, comparison, and synthesis) and ways to examine a point of view (judgment of preference, judgment of prescription, judgment of reality, and judgment of value), and other skills. This paper will focus on ways to examine a point of view. The ERC framework provides guidelines as follows:

**Table 1** ERC framework for examining a point of view

Related content	Definitions	Examples	Paths for examining a point of view
Judgment of preference	Proposition that is subjective in relation to tastes and preferences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think democracy is better than dictatorship.</li> <li>- I like Christmas festivities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Look for reasons for a particular preference.</li> <li>- Examine whether there is a reason for a particular preference, etc.</li> </ul>
Judgment of prescription	Proposition that states a recommendation or an obligation. The judgment of prescription reinforces the need to accomplish an act, to modify a situation or to solve a problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Never kill.</li> <li>- We have to work together to keep our school clean.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examine the underlying reasons for a particular judgment.</li> <li>- Examine whether there is an implicit reason for a particular judgment.</li> <li>- Ensure that the proposition is realistic and that it can be verified by being put into practice.</li> </ul>
Judgment of reality	Proposition that attempts to be objective regarding observable facts, an event or a person's observations. A judgment of reality may be false.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Bible is the holy book for Christians.</li> <li>- The media influence our society.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Verify where sources come from: personal observation, reliable testimony, valid scientific theory, recognized authority, etc.</li> <li>- Verify the reliability of facts or observations that are put forward, etc.</li> </ul>
Judgment of value	Proposition that gives more weight to certain values than to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Money buys you happiness.</li> <li>- Love your neighbor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examine the underlying reasons for a particular judgment.</li> <li>- Ensure that the meaning of the stated judgment of value is clear.</li> <li>- Examine whether there are implicit reasons for a particular judgment, etc.</li> </ul>

**Source:** Quebec Education Program “Ethics and Religious Culture,” 2008, p. 51

This paper applies this framework to study the Buddha's methods of examining a point of view in the *Suttanta Pitaka*.

## Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative content analysis (QCA) approach to study the Buddha's ID narratives in the three collections - *Digha Nikaya* (The Long Discourses of the Buddha) (DN), *Majjhima Nikaya* (The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha) (MN), and *Anguttara Nikaya* (The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha) (AN). QCA is “a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material” that requires some degree of interpretation. It is best suited for describing the selected aspects of the

material guided by the research questions particularly of descriptive type (Schreier, 2012, pp. 1–9). This method was suitable for this study because the study only focuses on describing some aspects of the dialogue narratives, namely the Buddha’s methods of examining a point of view in dialogue. From the three collections, the study found 110 suttas that contain dialogues between the Buddha and people of other faiths. Dialogues between the Buddha and his disciples or those between his disciples and people of other faiths were excluded. The study selected 52 distinct suttas for analysis. These suttas were selected based on two criteria: (1) giving fuller and richer data for the research questions especially when the researcher had to choose among similar suttas; and (2) giving diverse or new information for the research questions. The unit of analysis was defined as a dialogical episode—a specific exchange where a point of view was expressed and examined. For example, in *Majjhima Nikaya* 36, *Mahasaccaka Sutta* (MN I 250 – 251; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp. 342-343), Nigantha Nataputta’s dialogue with the Buddha on whether sleeping during daytime is delusion was coded as an episode. Each episode was analyzed and coded into one of the four ERC judgment categories: preference, prescription, reality, or value. A sutta may have more than one unit of analysis or category. For example, the above episode in MN 36 was coded as judgement of value. MN 36 also has another coded category: judgement of reality which refers to another dialogical episode on Nigantha Nataputta’s statement that the Buddha’s teaching and practice only focus on training of the mind without training of the body (MN I 238 – 240; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp. 332 – 334). Each unit under each type of judgement is analyzed for sub-themes or criteria that guide the judgement. The author used the English translations of the three collections by Walshe (1995), Nanamoli and Bodhi (1995) and Bodhi (2012) as the main source for analysis. To ensure accuracy, the Vietnamese (the author’s native language) translations of the three collections by Thich Minh Chau: DN (1991), MN (1992) and AN (1996), were cross-checked.

## Research Findings

The study found that all four types of view in the ERC framework: judgment of preference, judgment of prescription, judgment of reality and judgment of value are found in the Buddha’s dialogues. Some of the Buddha’s methods resonate with the ERC guidelines for examining each type of view. However, the Buddha provides concrete frameworks and criteria for judging each type of view whereas the ERC guidelines are general, mainly for recognizing motivation of the speaker, and very few criteria for judging the view. Table 2 below is a summary of the research findings in comparison with the ERC framework.

View point types	ERC’s methods to examine a view point (Ethics and Religious Culture, 2008, 51)	Buddha’s methods to examine a point of view	Buddha’s dialogue examples
Judgment of preference	+ Look for reasons for a particular preference + Examine whether there is a reason for a particular preference, etc.	Buddha responds to the other’s statement of preference according to his discriminative wisdom and gives reason for it. He also gives his own view with concrete framework and criteria for understanding and verification. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Rejecting it as inferior and giving his higher framework</li> <li>(2) Correcting the other and giving reasons (using the other’s own tradition, showing counter-evidence)</li> <li>(3) Refusing to answer the other’s questions and explaining his preference</li> <li>(4) Making a different preference and giving reasons</li> </ol>	DN 5, 25 MN 72 AN 3.60; 4.100
Judgment of prescription	+ Examine underlying reasons for a particular judgment + Examine if there is an implicit reason for it + Ensure the proposition is realistic, can be verified by being put into practice	The Buddha’s framework for judgment of prescription: How to know if a prescription is good <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Universal,</li> <li>(2) Wholesome</li> <li>(3) Consistent,</li> <li>(4) Core (accurate, irreducible),</li> <li>(5) Verifiable through concrete and comprehensive framework for understanding and realization in practice.</li> </ol>	DN 3, 4, 12, 31 MN 58, 93, 96, 152 AN 3.65; 5.192; 7.47
Judgment of reality	+ Verify where sources come from: personal observation, reliable testimony, valid scientific theory, recognized authority, etc. + Verify the reliability of facts or observations that are put forward, etc.	Dealing with accusations: not finding out the source but dealing with the content accordingly <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Proving that it is impossible for the Buddha with his recognized superior virtue and wisdom to perform such an unwholesome conduct.</li> <li>(2) For doctrinal misunderstanding, the Buddha provides the correct understanding or explains it by various ways for the person to understand, through concrete framework for analysis</li> <li>(3) Through direct counter-experience to discredit the wrong accusation or judgment</li> </ol> Judgment of truth claims: How to know if a statement is true to reality <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Based on direct supreme knowledge and experience, verified by experience.</li> <li>(2) Rational judgment based on wholesome framework and criteria accepted by the <i>Arahants</i> and the wise</li> <li>(3) Consistency between the truth claim and reality</li> </ol>	DN 8, 16 [Ch.1]; MN 14, 36, 55, 56, 60, 75, 79, 85, 86, 90, 95, 99, 101, 107 AN 3.57; 3.61; 4.193; 4.195; 6.38; 7.57; 8.11; 8.12; 9.38
Judgment of value	+ Examine underlying reasons for a particular judgment + Ensure the meaning of the stated judgment of value is clear. + Examine if there are implicit reasons for a particular judgment, etc.	The Buddha evaluates the value of view and practice according to his discriminative wisdom, gives reasons, and provides his own concrete framework for understanding and verification. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Why this teaching and practice is unsound or wrong; what is the correct one, framework for realization</li> <li>(2) Why this way of religious practice is inferior and why the other ways are superior and their concrete framework for realization in practice</li> <li>(3) Why this way is incomplete and how to make it complete</li> <li>(4) Why this is the best</li> </ol>	DN 13, 16[Ch.5], 25 MN 27, 30, 36, 54, 77, 90 AN 3.35; 3.58; 4.35; 7.50; 10.119

## 1. Judgment of Preference

According to the ERC framework, a judgment of preference is examined by finding if there is a reason for it and what the reason is. This point of view is the least found from the Buddha's dialogues. There are 5 suttas of this type. The Buddha examines this point of view according to his discriminative wisdom and gives reasons for it. He also provides his own view of preference with concrete framework and criteria for understanding and practice. The study found 4 ways that the Buddha responds to a judgment of preference: (1) rejecting it as inferior and giving his higher framework (DN 5); (2) correcting the other's view and giving reasons based on the other's own tradition (DN 25), or showing counter-evidence (AN 3.60); (3) refusing to answer the other's preferred issue and explaining why (MN 72); and (4) making a different preference and giving a reason for it (AN 4.100).

### 1.1 Rejecting inferior preference and suggesting superior ones

An example of the first type is *Digha Nikaya 5, Kuṭa-Danta Sutta* (About Kutadanta a bloodless sacrifice) (DN 1 127-149; Walshe 1995, pp. 134–145), the *brahmin* named Kuṭadanta wants to make a big sacrifice with hundreds of animals prepared to be killed. He asks for the Buddha's advice on how to make a great meritorious sacrifice according to an ancient formula. The Buddha satisfies him with detailed description of the formula which appear extremely complicated and with a lot of difficult requirements. The *brahmin* asks if there is other sacrifice less difficult and less troublesome, with more fruit and more advantage than this. The Buddha gradually provides the *brahmin* with several options from lower to higher such as making offering to virtuous recluses, building temples for the order of monks, having faith in the three Gems of Buddhism, observing the five precepts, and finally practicing the Buddhist renunciation path to reach the highest fruit of *arahant*. The Buddha concludes that this is the highest meritorious sacrifice. The Buddha tells the *brahmin* that these ways of sacrifice are superior to the *brahmin* way because they do not involve killing and they attract virtuous people like *arahants*.

### 1.2 Correcting the other views and giving reasons

For certain kinds of preference, the Buddha makes correction and gives justification for it. For example, in *Digha Nikaya 25, Udumbarika-Sihanada Sutta* (The great lion's roar to the Udumbarikans) (DN III 54 - 56; Walshe 1995, pp. 392-393), the wanderer Nigrodha criticizes the Buddha's seclusion lifestyle as timid, backward, and lack of public speaking skill. During the Buddha's time, wanderers were religious ascetics who enjoyed noises and debates on all kinds of things in the world. The Buddha corrects him that seclusion is the preferable way of life for all virtuous and enlightened people. He reminds the wanderer of his own tradition in which ancient venerable elder teachers of teachers of wanderers taught about the seclusion style of Buddhas, *arahants* and exalted ones of past ages. The Buddha criticizes Nigrodha who claims to be wise but is unable to recognize the Buddha and his superior achievements and teachings.

### 1.3 Refusing to answer the other's preferred issue and explaining why

Another response of the Buddha to the other's judgment of preference is his refusal to address the issue. A good example of this is *Majjhima Nikaya 72, Aggivacchagotta Sutta* (To Vacchagotta on fire) (MN I 485 – 489; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp. 590 – 594). The wanderer Vacchagotta is interested in metaphysical issues. He comes to ask the Buddha several metaphysical questions. The Buddha refuses to answer all of them. The wanderer asks for the reason. The Buddha explains the danger of attachment to views and how non-attachment to views leads to liberation.

### 1.4 Making a different preference and giving reasons for it

Sometimes the Buddha does not make any comment on the other's preferred view. He only presents his different preference and gives reasons for it. For example, in the *Potaliya Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 4.100* (AN II 100 – 102; Bodhi, 2012, pp. 480 – 482), the Buddha presents four types of person in the world: (1) a person who speaks dispraise of someone who deserves dispraise and this dispraise is accurate, truthful, and timely; but he does not speak praise of someone who deserves praise though the praise would be accurate, truthful, and timely. (2) A person who does the reverse of the first type. (3) A person who does not speak both types of speech. (4) And a person who speaks both types of speech. The Buddha asks the wanderer Potaliya to choose which one as the most excellent and supreme type. Potaliya chooses the third type of person because this person shows equanimity, letting go of both praise and dispraise. The Buddha does not give any comment on Potaliya's answer but he says that he prefers the fourth type of person because this person has wisdom of the proper time to speak in any particular case.

The above four cases show that the Buddha has discriminative wisdom. He rejects what is worth rejecting, corrects what needs correction, refuses things that are unprofitable, and reveals what is superior, complete, and profitable. For all cases, the Buddha gives reasons for his choices.

## 2. Judgment of Prescription

Concerning how to evaluate a judgment of prescription, the ERC framework suggests two criteria: finding an underlying reason for the prescription and checking the realistic nature of it. This type of judgment is found in 11 suttas. While the ERC framework suggests two criteria for examining a point of view on prescription, this study found that the Buddha has at least five criteria for evaluating a prescription: (1) universal; (2) wholesome; (3) consistent; (4) core (accurate, irreducible); and (5) verifiable through concrete and comprehensive framework for understanding and realization in practice. This does not mean that each prescription must meet all those criteria. It depends on the nature of the prescription that the Buddha uses appropriate criteria for his judgment. Below are detailed explanations and examples of each criterion.

### 2.1 Universal (widely acceptable)

The universal characteristic of the prescription means that it must be widely accepted and applicable to all people without discrimination. For example, in *Majjhima Nikaya 96, Esukari Sutta* (To Esukari) (MN II 178 – 179; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp.

786 – 787), the *brahmin* Esukari asks for the Buddha's view on the *brahmins'* prescription of service for the four castes: *brahmin*, noble, merchant and worker. According to this prescription, the latter three castes have to serve the *brahmin* caste. The Buddha asks the *brahmin* if this prescription is agreed by everyone. The *brahmin* said "No". The Buddha analogizes this prescription to the act of forcing a very poor man to eat meat and asking him to pay for the forced food. For the Buddha, this prescription is a discrimination and oppression against other castes rather than a universal truth as declared by the *brahmins*.

### 2.2 Wholesome

The second criterion for evaluating a judgment of prescription is wholesomeness. A wholesome prescription must be built on the moral law of cause and effect or the law of *kamma*. It must conduce to benefit, peace, and happiness rather than disadvantage and suffering for oneself, others, and both. For example, in *Digha Nikaya* 12, *Lohicca Sutta* (About Lohicca: Good and bad teachers) (DN I 224 – 234; Walshe, 1995, pp. 181 – 185), the *brahmin* Lohicca has a view that a *brahmin* or recluse who has a spiritual achievement should not teach anyone else about it. He sees this as a form of lust. The Buddha shows him that his view is unwholesome or unsound doctrine based on a moral cause and effect analysis. First, anyone who says this statement is a danger-maker or putting obstacle on the way for others to seek benefit. Second, this person does not consider the welfare of others. Third, this person has enmity in the heart. Fourth, this unwholesome view would lead the person to rebirth in hell or animal realms.

### 2.3 Consistent

Being consistent is another criterion for judging a prescription meaning that it should not contradict or mismatches reality. For example, in *Digha Nikaya* 3, *Ambatthā Sutta* (About Ambattha: Pride humbled) (DN I 87 – 107; Walshe, 1995, pp. 111 – 122), the *brahmins* prescribe that the *brahmin* caste is superior to the other three castes by birth and by their religious practice. The Buddha points out several contradictions about this norm. First, the Buddha shows that when comparing women with women, or men with men in several life cases including when a member from both groups fall into the deepest degradation, the *Kshatriyas* (noble caste) are superior to the *brahmin* caste in receiving respect. Second, if going far enough in the lineage of a *brahmin* such as the case of the young *brahmin* Ambattha, his ancestral mother was a slave of the *Kshatriyas*. If so, how possible for the *brahmins* to claim that they are of a pure lineage. Third, the Buddha shows that the present *brahmins* are worse than the most inferior types of *brahmins* in the past. They enjoy all sensual pleasures but claim to be holy by reciting the verses of ancient ascetics who did not ever live such a luxurious life. These evident contradictions show that the *brahmins'* prescription of their superiority to other castes and holiness is not consistent.

### 2.4 Core (accurate, irreducible)

Another criterion the Buddha uses to evaluate a religious norm is whether or not it expresses the core meaning of the issue in concern. Being core means being accurate, irreducible, and not worthy of blame for falsehood. A good example of this is *Digha*

*Nikaya 4, Sonadaṇḍa Sutta* (About Sonadanda: The qualities of a true brahmin) (DN I 119 – 124; Walshe, 1995, pp. 129 - 131). In a dialogue with the high ranking *brahmin* Sonadanda in front of a big *brahmin* audience, the Buddha asks the brahmin what requirements to be met in order to be worthy calling a *brahmin*. The *brahmin* answers that there are five requirements: (1) well-born from both sides; (2) well-versed in the 3 *Vedas*, sophistry, and theory of signs of a great man; (3) handsome and pleasant to look upon; (4) virtuous and increased in virtue; (5) learned and wise. The Buddha asks the *brahmin* if it is possible to reduce the requirements to four. The *brahmin* says “Yes” and removes the first one. In this manner, back and forth, the Buddha and the *brahmin* reduces the formula to the last two requirements. Up to this point, the *brahmin* argues that these two criteria cannot be reduced anymore because they are core and mutually purified: wisdom is purified by virtue and virtue is purified by wisdom. The Buddha agrees with this view and explanation.

### *2.5 Verifiable through concrete and comprehensive framework for understanding and realization in practice*

The last criterion that the Buddha uses to judge a prescription is that a good prescription must have a concrete and comprehensive framework for understanding and realization in practice. In other words, any prescription must have a concrete way to verify its truth in reality. This criterion is found in several suttas (DN 3, 4, 12, 31; MN 58, 96, 152; AN 3.65; 7.47). For example, in *Digha Nikaya 4, Sonadaṇḍa Sutta* (About Sonadanda: The qualities of a true brahmin) (DN I 124 – 126; Walshe, 1995, pp.131-132), when the Buddha asks the *brahmin* Sonadanda what virtue and wisdom mean in the *brahmin* religious understanding and practice, the *brahmin* Sonadanda confesses that he only knows the general statement of *brahmin* teaching. He asks the Buddha to explain the meaning of it. The Buddha starts to teach the systematic Buddhist path of the threefold training: virtue or morality (precepts), concentration, and wisdom. In this path, virtue is cultivated through keeping precepts from lower to higher levels. The keeping of precepts leads to tranquility and mastery of mind and heart. This tranquility and mastery of mind and heart give rise to wisdom or insights. This is the Buddhist concrete path of practice to realize virtue and wisdom.

In short, while the ERC framework provides two criteria for examining a prescription by finding out the underlying reason and the practicality of it, as far as this study found, the Buddha contributes five more criteria. These include: (1) universal; (2) wholesome; (3) consistent; (4) core (accurate, irreducible); and (5) verifiable through concrete and comprehensive framework for understanding and realization in practice. Like the ERC framework, he sees the realistic nature of a prescription as an important criterion but he goes further than that by providing a concrete comprehensive framework for measuring and verifying the realistic nature of the prescription.

### **3. Judgment of Reality**

In examining a judgment of reality, the ERC framework provides two criteria: (1) verifying the sources of the judgment; and (2) verifying “the reliability of facts or

observations that are put forward”. This type of judgment is found in 25 suttas. Concerning the Buddha’s methods of examining judgment of reality, this study divides the Buddha’s methods into two categories: (1) how the Buddha deals with accusations against him and his teachings; and (2) how the Buddha deals with truth claims. The Buddha has his own methods to deal with each category. Instead of finding out the source of the statement as suggested by the ERC framework, the Buddha focuses on the content of the statement and deals with it accordingly. While the ERC framework proposes to check the reliability of the facts or observations that are put forward in the statement, the Buddha provides the criteria for checking this reliability. Below are detailed explanations and examples for each category.

### 3.1 Dealing with accusations

The Buddha’s first method of dealing with accusation is proving the impossibility for the Buddha with recognized superior virtue and wisdom to make such a statement or perform such an act (DN 8; MN 55). For example, in *Digha Nikaya* 8, *Mahasihanada Sutta* (The great lion’s roar) (DN I 161 – 177; Walshe, 1995, pp. 151 – 157), the naked ascetic Kassapa wants to clarify with the Buddha the rumor that the Buddha discredits all forms of asceticism. The Buddha discredits this accusation as wrong based on his superknowledge, recognized virtue and wholesome speech principles, and his discriminative knowledge of ascetic practices from lower to higher and highest level. The Buddha could not make such a thoughtless statement that was accused.

The second method of dealing with accusation is that the Buddha provides the correct understanding of the issue and explains it for the other to understand. The Buddha also provides a concrete comprehensive framework for understanding the issue. For example, in *Anguttara Nikaya* 3.57, *Vaccha* (AN I 160 – 163; Bodhi, 2012, pp. 254 – 256), the ascetic wanderer Vacchagotta comes to clarify with the Buddha if it is true that the Buddha made this statement “Alms should be given only to me, not to others; alms should be given only to my disciples, not to the disciples of others. Only what is given to me is very fruitful, not what is given to others; only what is given to my disciples is very fruitful, not what is given to the disciples of others.” The Buddha immediately rejects the accusation as wrong based on the ethical problem of the statement. He points out three moral problems of the statement: anyone who teaches this creates three obstacles and steals three things from people: (1) that person prevents the giver from making merit; (2) the person prevents the other from receiving the offering, and (3) that person’s ego grows. Then the Buddha provides the correct framework of great-merit making. He declares that making offering to virtuous people creates great merit. Virtuous people are those who have terminated 5 things (greed, anger, delusion, ego, and doubt) and fulfilled 5 things (completion of virtue, completion of concentration, completion of wisdom, completion of liberation, and completion of liberative knowledge).

Another method the Buddha uses to counter accusation is direct experience. For example, in *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.193, *Bhaddiya* (AN II 191 – 194; Bodhi, 2012, pp. 567 – 570), a Licchavi person named Bhaddiya comes to see the Buddha and presents the

accusation that the Buddha uses magic to draw disciples from other religious groups. The Buddha does not discredit it immediately but he presents his internal beautiful truth to the person. The truth presented here is a framework for the person to use rational mind to evaluate any claim or statement by himself rather than relying on certain sources. The Buddha engages Bhaddiya in the conversation through a series of questions and answers. When Bhaddiya understands the Buddha's truth, he becomes fascinated and converts. The Buddha takes the opportunity to ask Bhaddiya to confirm if the Buddha has asked him to become his disciple. Bhaddiya says "No". The Buddha then discredits the accusation as untrue, empty and a lie. Bhaddiya is amazed at the Buddha's beautiful truth and considers it as a wonderful magic. He wishes all people would be attracted by this magic so that they would live happily in a long time.

To sum up, the Buddha is flexible and skillful in his dealing with accusations against him and his teachings. Instead of looking for the reasons and the source of the accusation, the Buddha works immediately with the content of the accusation accordingly. For certain cases, he proves it untrue and impossible based on his superior virtue, wisdom and wholesome principles. For some other cases, he analyzes the problems of the statement and provides the correct one. For some special cases, he creates direct experience in the other which helps him or her realize the accusation as wrong and unfounded. For all three cases, the Buddha always speaks in concrete frameworks that he constructs based on his enlightened wisdom.

### 3.2 Dealing with truth claims

The second category of judgment of reality is judgment of truth claim. The Buddha has his own methods to evaluate a truth claim if it is true to reality or not. This study found three criteria that the Buddha uses to evaluate truth claim. First, truth claim must be verifiable through direct experience (MN 14, 36, 85, 95, 99, 101; AN 4.195; 9.38). The Buddha rejects truth claim that is based on unfounded belief. Second, truth claim must be rational and presented in a wholesome framework and criteria accepted by the *arahants* and the wise (MN 14, 36, 60, 79, 95, 99, 101; AN 3.61; 9.38). Third, the truth claim must be consistent with the reality (MN 56, 79, 85, 107; AN 6.38; 7.57).

An example of the first and second criteria is *Majjhima Nikaya* 14, *Culadukkhakkhanda Sutta* (The shorter discourse on the mass of suffering) (MN I 92 – 95; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp. 187 – 189). The Buddha approaches the *Niganthas* or Jains who are practicing severe self-mortification for believing that this would remove their past bad *kamma*. The Buddha asks essential questions concerning the meaning and knowledge of their belief and practice such as: "Do you know if this extent of suffering has been removed or this extent of suffering needs to be removed, or with this extent of suffering removed, all suffering will be removed?", "Do you know what unwholesome things to be eliminated and what wholesome things to be developed in the present?" To all these rational and essential questions, the *Niganthas* do not know the answer. For the Buddha, their practice is groundless (it is not based on direct experience and knowledge), irrational, and unprofitable.

An example of the consistency between truth claim and reality is *Majjhima Nikaya* 85, *Bodhirajakumara Sutta* (To prince Bodhi) (MN II 91 – 97; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp. 704 – 709). The Buddha has a dialogue with the prince named Bodhi who claims that happiness cannot be gained by happiness but by suffering. The Buddha shows the prince that this view is not correct to reality based on the Buddha's own spiritual journey to supreme enlightenment. The Buddha testifies that the self-mortification path did not lead to happiness but the Buddhist middle path leads to happiness, which people can verify it by themselves.

In brief, this sub-section has presented two types of judgement of reality for the Buddha's case: examining a rumor or an accusation of the Buddha and a truth claim. For the first type, instead of finding out the sources of such a rumor or accusation, the Buddha focuses on the content of it. He treats each case of accusation accordingly and gives convincing arguments and supportive evidence. He speaks all these things in concrete framework and criteria. For the second type, judgment of truth claim, he uses: (1) direct superior knowledge and experience; (2) rationality and concrete wholesome framework; and (3) consistency of a truth claim and reality. For this second type, the Buddha deals with both the sources and the content of truth, which is similar to the ERC framework. However, the difference is that the Buddha creates standards for evaluating the issue.

#### 4. Judgment of Value

For examining judgment of value, the ERC framework suggests 2 criteria: (1) looking for underlying reasons, (2) clarity of the meaning. This type of judgement is found in 14 suttas. Like the ERC framework, the Buddha often takes time to clarify the other's point of view. Unlike the ERC suggestion to find the underlying reasons, the Buddha focuses on the content of the judgment and treats it accordingly based on his discriminative wisdom. He gives reasons and provides his own concrete framework for understanding and verification. This study divides the Buddha's methods of examining judgment of value into four cases:

- (1) Why this teaching or practice is unsound or wrong; what is the correct one, and framework for realization (DN 13, 16 [Ch.5]; MN 36, 77, 90; AN 3.35).
- (2) Why this way of religious practice is inferior and why the other ways are superior and their concrete framework for realization in practice (DN 25; MN 54; AN 3.58; 7.50; 10.119).
- (3) Why this way is incomplete and how to make it complete (MN 27)
- (4) Why this is the best (MN 30; AN 4.35)

An example of the first case “why this teaching or practice is unsound or wrong; what is the correct one, and framework for realization” is *Digha Nikaya* 13, *Tevijja Sutta* (The threefold knowledge) (DN I 235 – 252; Walshe, 1995, pp.187 – 195). The Buddha dialogues with two young *brahmins*, Vasettha and Bharadvaja, on what it means to be in union with *Brahma* or God. The Buddha criticizes the *brahmin* way of belief and practice of being one with *Brahma* as wrong or contrary to the truth. The Buddha lists 4 unsound things of their practice: (1) superstitious acts like praying, praising, wishing; (2)

indulgence in 5 sense-pleasures which *Brahma* does not; (3) being blinded by the 5 hindrances which *Brahma* is not; and (4) their way is pathless jungle while they misperceive that they will be born in a happy state of *Brahma*. Then the Buddha presents the correct path of practice to be in union with *Brahma*, the pure *Dhamma* path from the cleansing of the heart from the 5 hindrances, then the 4 *Brahma-Viharas*: heart of boundless kindness, heart of boundless compassion, heart of boundless joy, and heart of boundless equanimity.

For the second case “Why this way of religious practice is inferior and why the other ways are superior and their concrete framework for realization in practice”, an example is *Majjhima Nikaya* 54, *Potaliya Sutta* (To Potaliya) (MN I 359 – 368; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp. 466 – 473). Potaliya believes that he is practicing renunciation because he has abandoned family life and lived on simple food and clothes. However, the Buddha addresses him as a householder rather than a renunciant. He gets offended and angry with the Buddha. Then the Buddha presents to Potaliya different levels of renunciation according to the Buddhist gradual path. Potaliya then realizes by himself that his renunciation is inferior to all levels presented by the Buddha.

An example of the third case “Why this way is incomplete and how to make it complete” is *Majjhima Nikaya* 27, *Culahatthipadopama Sutta* (The shorter discourse on the simile of the elephant’s footprint) (MN I 176 – 184; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp. 269 – 277). A *brahmin* goes to see the Buddha and reports what his wanderer friend praises the Buddha’s greatness by listing four signs: (1) prudent *Sakya* or ruling people converted after meeting the Buddha; (2) same for the prudent *brahmins*; (3) same for the prudent householders; and (4) same for the prudent recluses. After having listened to this, the Buddha says that this praise is incomplete. Then the Buddha presents the excellent *Dhamma* path of practice and supreme achievements such as the 4 *Jhanas*, the 3 insights and the final liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Up to this point, the Buddha declares that it is enough to make a conclusion about the Buddha’s greatness.

For the last case “Why this is the best”, an example is *Majjhima Nikaya* 30, *Culasaropama Sutta* (The shorter discourse on the simile of the heartwood) (DN I 198 – 205; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, pp. 291 – 297). The Buddha dialogues with the *brahmin*, Pingalakoccha. This *brahmin* believes that the highest fruit of religious practice is supreme knowledge. The Buddha gives a metaphor of 5 persons seeking the core of a tree but only the fifth one gets the core to explain different levels of religious achievements: material gains and fame, virtue, meditation, wisdom, and liberation of heart and mind. The Buddha declares that there are more excellent things than knowledge such as the 8 holy concentrations, and the purity of heart. The best thing of the religious path is complete freedom or liberation from suffering or the cycle of rebirth.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, by applying the ERC framework of dialogue skills to analyze the Buddhist dialogue narratives in the *Suttanta Pitaka* with a focus on the skill of examining a point of view in dialogue including judgment of preference, judgment of prescription, judgment of reality and judgment of value, the study found that these types are present in the Buddha's dialogues. While the ERC framework provides some general guidelines for examining each type, it does not give any standards for the evaluation. In contrast, the Buddhist framework provides concrete frameworks and standards for evaluating each type. Being able to substantiate a religious view and communicate it in concrete and comprehensive framework is important in rational dialogue with the religious other. It will facilitate better understanding and communication. In this sense, the Buddhist knowledge can enrich the ERC framework and future education programs for ID competency in Asia. Future studies should explore other religions by applying this ERC framework to create more religious resources for interreligious dialogue skills education.

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