



ສະພາຄົມລາວ-ອະເມຣິກັນ

LAO-AMERICAN ASSOCIATION

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO : Prince Panya Mr. Nanley
Mr. Chandler Dr. Somphon
Mr. Issara ~~Mr. Woodson~~

FROM : Richard M. Hughes *[Signature]*

SUBJECT: FRIENDSHIP: Articles on religion

REF :

DATE : 21 April 1971

At the Board meeting of April 20, Mr. Allard presented on behalf of the Committee the two articles which have been prepared for FRIENDSHIP on Buddhism and Christianity. The Board concurred in his recommendation that each Board member should read the two articles, and the proposed foreword, and be prepared to express approval or suggestions at the May 18 meeting. Members present received copies at the meeting; since you were unable to be present, a copy is enclosed for your review (except for Mr. Chandler, who as a member of the Committee already has a copy).

Publisher's Note

Friendship is pleased to present in this issue two articles on the major religions of Laos and the United States, respectively: Buddhism and Christianity. The article on Christianity also contains much on the most important minority religion in America: Judaism, which is the faith of the Jewish people and the background of Christianity. The articles were prepared at the express request of the Board of Directors.

There are those who prefer to call Buddhism an ethical system, or way of life, rather than a religion; and indeed it does not entirely fit Mr. Roffe's definition of religion as he states it in the beginning of his article. Yet both Christianity and Buddhism offer paths of salvation from the ultimate results of evil-doing. Christianity considers each sin singly and provides for its expiation by confession, repentance and atonement through the mediation of Christ. Buddhism considers whether good or evil deeds are preponderant in one's lifetime, for Nirvana is not attained as the result of one lifetime but of a long cycle of rebirths in which the soul becomes increasingly capable of following the Noble Eightfold Path.

Both stress codes of interpersonal behavior. Maha Kham gives some details of the Noble Eightfold Path and then develops the six sets of social relationships. Jews and Christians will find close parallels between these and the Ten Commandments, Mosaic Law, the Book of Proverbs and scores of New Testament statements.

Friendship commends the articles of ~~Maha Kham~~ and the Rev. Mr. Roffe to the careful attention of its readers.

BUDDHISM

by Maha Kham Champakeomany

Buddhism has played an important cultural role in the world for 2513 years. The word Buddhism means "the teachings of the Buddha, the Enlightened One." Like Christianity, with its more than one billion followers, Buddhism is a large religion; it has about 500 million followers, including 165,000 on the North American continent. It is one of the great religions of the modern world. While Christianity is the primary religion of the people of Europe and the Americas, Buddhism is the primary religion of Asian people from Ceylon to Japan. It is composed of three main parts: the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings), and the Sangha (brotherhood of monks).

The Buddha

~~The~~ Buddha was a prince of the Gautama family of the Sakya clan of the warrior caste. This is the second highest caste in Hinduism. The clan ruled a small principality of which the capital was Kapilavastu. It was located in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent.

His first name was Siddhartha. He was born in 543 B.C., 2513 years ago, at Lumbini in what is now Nepal. His parents were King Suddhodhana and Queen Maya. The young prince was raised in royal luxury and splendor. His family had one palace for the cold season, one for the hot season and a third for the rainy season. Although the young prince lived in such marvelous surroundings, he did not cling to them. He came to the conclusion that worldly pleasures and possessions are the source of human sorrow, and made up his mind to renounce the world. At the age of 29, the prince one night left his palace and his family. He shaved his head and put on the distinctive saffron robe of a Brahminic monk.

Gautama spent six years trying to learn the nature of reality of life, testing various methods of meditation. He tried mortification of the flesh until starvation badly emaciated him. But this taught him nothing, and he returned to eating normally. Finally he seated himself under a tree in a village in the Bodhgaya district and began spiritual meditation. He vowed that he would not get up or move until he had figured out what to do about human suffering. After conquering the evil temptation of worldly passions, Gautama, now 35 years old, achieved his Enlightenment, and thereafter was known as the Buddha, the Enlightened One. The Buddha travelled to the nearby holy city of Banaras to preach his first sermon on the meaning of life. He spent the next 45 years traversing northern India, preaching and making converts to his religion. He died (passed to Nirvana) at the age of 80.

Dharma, the Teachings of the Buddha

The basic teaching of the Buddha can be learned from his First Sermon at Banaras. The Master tried to impress upon his listeners, five ascetic men who were his closest followers, the Law of Nature which he called

"The Four Noble Truths." These are (1) the existence of suffering, (2) the cause of suffering, (3) the end of suffering, and (4) the way to end suffering.

1. Suffering is called dukkha in Pali. It means "hard to bear or endure," as opposed to sukkha which means "easy to bear, or enjoyable." In English we can use many words for this idea of dukkha such as pain, unpleasantness, illness, dissatisfaction, frustration, anxiety, anguish, unhappiness, misery, sorrow and suffering itself. This condition is universal and is the first ~~law~~ ^{law} of Nature because it occurs to all things.

2. The cause of suffering, samudhaya in Pali, is craving or self-desire—tanha. Tanha, the feeling of urgency, insistence or passion, is divided into three kinds: (a) kamatanha, the craving for sensuous pleasure from sound, smell, taste, touch and feeling; (b) bhavatanha, the craving to be something or someone that we are not, or the desire to be reborn as someone different; and (c) vibhavatanha, the craving for non-existence, or the desire not to be reborn.

The tanha may also take other forms such as lobha or raga (greed, lust, avidity); dosa or kodha (hate, revulsion, anger); and moha (illusion or delusion). Since one's desires or wants are everlasting, not limited, the more one has the more one wants. Therefore these desires are the cause of suffering.

3. The end of suffering, nirodha, is the elimination of the craving which is the cause of suffering. One who has destroyed all kinds of craving attains the Enlightenment—Nirvana, the state of complete absence of all craving. The attainment of Nirvana breaks all earthly bonds such as sensuous or sexual pleasures, and puts an end to the effects of craving. It removes all desires and attachments to the five basic elements—rupa (form or body), vedana (feeling of pleasure or pain), sanna (name or position), sanikhara (tendencies and propensities, both physical and mental), and vinnana (consciousness)—of which human beings are made, and causes the mind to be immersed in bliss. Nirvana is said to be the highest state of human existence and the goal of Buddhism.

4. The way to the end of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path. The Path consists of right belief, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Right belief, or right view or understanding, consists of understanding and believing in the Four Noble Truths. It involves knowing that all is suffering, that all is impermanent, and that suffering arises from mistaking the impermanent as permanent.

Further, it is right to believe that as one shall reap what one has sown, so one who does good shall reap good fruit of his action, and one who does evil shall reap bad fruit of his action.

Right resolve, or attention; thought or aspiration, consists of embodying in oneself a disposition of non-attachment to, and freedom from ill will toward, or any desire to harm, any living thing. One's thoughts must be full of kindness and compassion toward all creatures, rejoicing at the success of fellow beings and of all humanity.

Right speech means refraining from lying, gossip, slander and harsh or frivolous talk.

Right conduct means refraining from killing, stealing and sexual perversion. Opportunity exists here for extending the guidelines to a broad social and moral code.

Right livelihood refers to the proper way of earning a living. Since one should not kill or harm, he should avoid occupations such as hunting, fishing, butchering, selling intoxicants or guns, robbing, or misrepresenting goods.

Right effort involves a fourfold constant striving. Negatively, one should try to root out old evil dispositions and avoid yielding to new temptations. Positively, one should seek to acquire and develop good new thoughts and to retain them continuously.

Right mindfulness emphasizes the need for constant alertness and attentiveness to one's ignorant conditions; to the impermanence of one's body, one's values, and the world; and to the missing of no opportunity for resisting regression and making progress. Intellectual self-searching, and the contemplation of death, of the transitoriness of life, of the unreality of the soul, of the insignificance of the mere aggregation of bodily particles, and of the futility of desire, are all things that come under right mindfulness.

Right concentration is concerned with so controlling the mind as to bring it into one focus by meditation. The mind which has been developed by meditation has an energy and light of wisdom or insight by which one will recognize the common law of Nature—that all is suffering, impermanent and non-self.

Right concentration is, in fact, very subtle and difficult. It can be compared to a ladder of four steps. They are (a) a state freed from craving, in which reasoning and investigation continues; (b) a state freed from reasoning and investigation, in which a feeling of joy and tranquility prevails; (c) a state freed from joy, in which consciousness of existence at ease remains; (d) a state freed from consciousness of existence at ease, in which is achieved the perfect insight that all is suffering because of difficulties to bear, impermanent because of changeability or ever-changingness, and non-self because of being not one's own, not belonging to one because one is unable to control or order it. At this point, Nirvana, the complete destruction of craving, is attained. There is non-attachment to earthly bonds and no returning into the world of suffering. The cycle of rebirths is at an end; but rare and holy individuals called Buddhistas, who wish to continue to help mankind,

may continue on earth in such a way that all danger of returning to mundane suffering has been eliminated.

The Buddha's teaching can be summed up in three directives; avoid evil, do good, and purify your mind. Even more briefly, it is included in the full meaning of right mindfulness.

Sangha, the Brotherhood of Monks

The followers of Buddhism may be said to consist of two groups: the sangha, and laymen.

Duties of the sangha. In the beginning the Buddha himself initiated his disciples. Afterwards this task was entrusted to his disciples, collectively called the sangha. The minimum age for initiation is ten years for novicehood and a full twenty years for monkhood. The permission of parents is indispensable. A person between ten and twenty-one years of age who wants to become a novice (samanera) has his head and face fully shaved, and dons yellow robes. Sponsored by a teacher, he appears before a sangha of at least four monks. If there is no objection from any of them, he is initiated as a novice, and observes the prohibition of ten acts; namely, violence to creatures, theft, adultery, falsehood, intoxication, afternoon meals, dance and song, garlands and ornaments, sleeping on high beds, and the acceptance of gold and silver money as gifts.

If upon reaching his twentieth birthday he is found fit, he may be examined for next higher level (upasampada) by no less than ten monks in a country in which there are a great many monks, or by five in a country of few monks. If there is no objection from any of them he is ordained a monk.

Monks must observe the prohibition of 270 acts, but we have no room to list them here. Such prohibition of acts is the first step in the practice of Buddhism. The second step is meditation for attaining the third step of insight or wisdom, as mentioned above. Besides these duties, the monk should also preach the Buddha's teachings to the people and work for the improvement of the social welfare of all.

Duties of laymen. A Buddhist house-holder is instructed to follow an economical way of life. This way of life consists of four requisites, three financial needs and six financial disadvantages.

The four requisites are (1) energy in earning, (2) attention to keeping what is earned, (3) simple living, and (4) keeping company with good persons.

The three financial needs refer to the precept that of the money which the householder has earned, one part should be spent for daily life, one part saved for the time of illness or other extraordinary expenses, and one part saved for charity.

The six financial disadvantages which the householder must take care to avoid—that is, six things leading to the loss of earnings—are (1) addiction

to drinking liquor, because such action is a cause of carelessness; (2) addition to being on the street at untimely hours, especially after midnight; (3) addiction to attending feasts, because of the uselessness of that luxury; (4) addiction to gambling; (5) addiction to bad companions, because they may persuade him to commit crimes; (6) addiction to laziness.

Interpersonal Relationships of Buddhists

Buddhism instructs its disciples in six sets of social relationships.

1. Parents and children. Parents are instructed to restrain their children from doing bad deeds, to exhort them to do good, to give them good educations, to arrange suitable marriages in due time, and to hand over the inheritance to them at the proper time. Children, in return, help the family in its chores, support their parents in their old age, continue the family line, act in such a way as to be worthy of their inheritance, and offer alms in honor of the departed parents.

2. Teachers and students. The teacher should be responsible to the students in the following ways: giving the students the best of instruction, helping them to learn quickly and well, teaching them the necessary arts and sciences, introducing them to their peers, and keeping them safe in every way. Students must rise in the presence of a teacher, attend to the needs of the teacher, listen attentively to their instruction, and study diligently.

3. Husbands and wives. Husbands must observe the following directives in regard to their wives; honor them, avoid disrespect to them, be faithful to them, entrust their money to them, and provide them with garments and ornaments. Wives must in turn perform their chores and duties, treat the friends and relatives of their husbands generously and hospitably, be faithful to their husbands, protect the money entrusted to them, and carry out all their responsibilities diligently.

4. Friends, companions. Since men are social animals, they associate with neighbors and friends daily. So Buddhism instructs its followers to seek out friends and companions who can be trusted. Each person should be generous, speak courteously, promote good, treat all friends equally, and trust friends and companions. Having received such treatment, a person should treat his friends in the following manner: look after them when they are careless, safeguard their property when they are negligent, render assistance when they are in trouble, protect their children, and assist them in any way possible.

5. Employers and employees. Employers should treat their employees or servants in the following manner: give them work appropriate to their ability and strength; provide them with food, clothing, housing and wages; tend to them in sickness; share special treats with them; and give them rest and holidays at the proper time. Employees should arise before their employers, arrive at work on time, leave work after them and go to sleep after they have, take only what is given, carry out their orders promptly and with pleasure, and speak well of them.

6. Monks and laymen. The monks depend upon the laymen for their livelihood because they lead homeless lives, dedicated to maintaining the Buddha's teachings and preaching them to the people. So monks should minister to the lay devotees by dissuading them from evil, exhorting them to do good, loving them with a kind heart, teaching them what they do not know and making clear what they have already heard, and showing them the path to a state of happiness. The laymen must minister to the monks by speaking to them with affection, showing friendliness in deeds, thinking of them respectfully, being generous in supplying their wants readily, and providing them with their material needs.

Hinayana and Mahayana

Buddhism is divided into two main sects; namely Hinayana (or Theravada), and Mahayana. The major difference between them are as follows.

The Hinayanist follows the original teachings of the Buddha as set forth in the Pali Canon (Tripitaka). The final purpose is the enlightenment of oneself alone. It respects the Buddha as the greatest teacher and the one who shows the way to the end of suffering.

The correct name of this school is Theravada, meaning orthodox, but it was later called Hinayana, the "Lesser Vehicle," by the Mahayana. This school of Buddhism prevails in Southeast Asia; Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos are its strongholds.

In the course of time, there was a strong protest against the Theravada doctrine from a section of the Buddhists. This protestant faith came to be known as Mahayana. The date or origin of the Mahayana cannot be precisely determined. Certain historical evidence points to its origin around the first century B.C. It gradually earned popularity and was recognized in the time of King Kanishka, of northwestern India, in the last part of the first century A.D.

To the Buddhists of the Mahayana school, the Buddha was not a mere man. He was a superman; nay, an adorable deity. This school believes in the traditional canon in Sanskrit. After the Buddha's death the Pali text of sacred books was translated into Sanskrit and the translation was brought to Tibet, China, Korea and Japan. The final purpose of the Mahayana is to obtain the Buddhahood, or the enlightened state. So the ideal Mahayana Buddhist becomes a saintly figure, a Bodhisattva, a holy ~~man who had vowed that he would not enter Nirvana until the whole human race had achieved salvation with him.~~ It is from this principle that the name Mahayana, the "Greater Vehicle," comes, because it is the way by which the whole human race enters Nirvana.

The principal features of this doctrine are as follows:

(1) The realization of the falsity of the phenomenal world besides the emptiness of oneself.

- (2) Comprehension of innumerable Buddhas and Bodhisatvas.
- (3) Worship of gods and goddesses. Many of the deities of the Hindu religion are included.
- (4) The utility of mantra (magic) as a means of liberation.
- (5) The superiority of the mind; that is, all is mind. Man is born from his thought, and what he finds around him is born in the mind.

Today these doctrines are held primarily in Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

Buddhist Cultural Influence

Buddhism has played an important social role in all countries that have adopted it. In Laos the culture absorbed many different ideas from Buddhism. These can be broken down as follows:

Political thought. The form of government in Laos, although monarchical, needs a supporting majority of the people. The ancient Lao Kings believed themselves to be incarnations of Bodhisatvas. They believed that they were sent down to earth to protect the world, to assist in the social welfare and to save human beings from suffering. Even so, they still listened to their people's voices and needed support from them. The King was also to follow Rajadharma, or royal behavior such as charity, kindness, compassion, hatelessness, welfare service and carefulness. These ideas all come from Buddhism.

Social conditions. Although Buddhism rejects the caste system, there are generally believed to be three classes of people; the ruler, the monk and the common people. In the Buddhist world, especially in Laos, the King is the leader of the people, the monk is the teacher and the common man is the follower. The monks have the responsibility for educating the people. In former times, the Buddhist monasteries were the centers of education for the general population.

Buddhism has also affected the family structure. Lao families are extended families. They prefer to live together in one house, one village, and one town. There are many members living together in one family because they seek each other for help with the work. Parents are due great respect because it is part of the Buddhist thought that the parents are gods in the family. Children must treat their parents generously and respectfully. The parents are gods because they are of Brahmavikra dharma (quality of god), and so they must exhibit kindness, compassion, happiness at the success of their children, and equanimity in the time of failure of their children after they have tried their best to help them.

In regard to the position of women, the Buddhist doctrine teaches that women are entitled to freedom and equal rights with men, and in some cases they are afforded more privileges than their husbands. Women must always be treated politely and respectfully.

Art and literature. Like art in other Buddhist countries, Lao art is strongly influenced by the Buddhist religion. The major portion of Lao art is religious art such as temple paintings, Buddha statues, carved windows and doors of temples, and sculptures and paintings depicting scenes of the life of Buddha. Years ago the monks were the art teachers, but nowadays that position has generally been taken over by laymen.

Language and writing have also been influenced by Buddhism. Many Lao words come from Pali: for example, lathaban (government), lathamontry (Prime Minister), and yithanyou (radio, from yijiu, thunderbolt).

The theme of much of Lao literature is taken from religious stories and heroes. The famous stories of Song-Sinxai, Karaket and Teng-on are all based on the theme of an incarnation of a Bodhisatva who comes down from heaven in the form of a human being to save the world and destroy evil.

About the author. Maha Khan Champakeomany was born in a village in Sithandone Province, in southern Laos. Educated in Bangkok, he took his B.A. degree in 1965 from Mahamakut University, a Buddhist institution. Continuing his studies in ancient history, culture, and archeology at Banaras University in India, he received his M.A. in 1968. He now teaches in the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Vientiane.