

Self-Responsibility, Not Belief in Dogma

Lessons from the Buddha

The Great Transformation – the Beginning of our Religious Traditions

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... The only way of assessing the Buddha's method was to put it into practice. He had no time for abstract doctrinal formulae divorced from action. A person's theology was a matter of total indifference to the Buddha. Indeed, to accept a dogma on somebody else's authority was unskillful; it could not lead to enlightenment because it amounted to an abdication of personal responsibility.

Faith meant trust [*I would say trust from a deep, personal, fluid, intuitive "knowing" or perhaps experiential "knowing" (though single experiences – e.g., Wilber's distinction between momentary "states" of higher consciousness vs. more stable "stages" of higher consciousness – sometimes fade and do not seem to hold up and sustain one), not a "leap of intellectual belief in dogma from an external authority" to cling to, confess, and defend - Gary*] that *nirvana* existed and a determination to realize it. He always insisted that his disciples test everything he taught them. A religious idea could all too easily become a mental idol, one more thing to cling to, while the purpose of the *dharma* [*Buddha's teachings*] was to help people to let go. Even his own teachings must be jettisoned, once they had done their job.

He liked to tell the story of a traveler who came to a great expanse of water and desperately needed to get across. But there was no bridge or ferry, so he cobbled together a raft and paddled over. But then, the Buddha would ask his audience, what should the traveler do with the raft? Should he decide that because it had been so helpful to him, he must load it onto his back and lug it around with him wherever he went? Or should he simply moor it and continue his journey? The answer was obvious. "In just the same way, monks, my teachings are like a raft, to be used to cross the river and not to be held on to," the Buddha concluded. His task was not to issue infallible statements or satisfy intellectual curiosity, but to enable people to cross the river of pain and arrive at the "further shore." Anything that did not serve that end was irrelevant.

The Buddha had, therefore, no theories about the creation of the world or the existence of God. These topics were, of course, extremely fascinating, but he refused to discuss them. Why? "Be cause, my disciples, they will not help you, they are not useful in the quest for holiness; they do not lead to peace and to the direct knowledge of *nirvana*." ...