

Summary

Buddhism is a religion of peace based on understanding the indispensability of tolerance and respect for difference and diversity.

This understanding is described through the words of the Buddha, and also the great India ruler King Asoka who instigated a remarkable period of Indian history through governance according to Dharma principles.

Tolerance and Respect for Other Religions

The Teachings and advice of the Buddha completely support tolerance and respect for other religions to ensure that all are given a 'fair go'. Buddhist practitioners respect all religions as it is their objective to live in peace and harmony with all.

I would like to read to you from a paper called "A Fair Go for All" by John D. Hughes, who was the Founder of The Buddhist Discussion Centre. It was a paper presented at the International Conference on Religious Cooperation, Taiwan, 2001.

"From a Buddhist perspective, we know about rebirth and know in some lives we are born of this religion and in other lives we are born into a different religion. Provided we have had a series of human births (rather than animal births where we learn nothing) we already have some innate sense of each other's religion because of these past causes.

We need not shift from our own religion to another religion to be able to cooperate with one another. But with the negative forces of the world driving persons towards atrocious acts, we must unite to fight what Buddhists call mara and Christians call demonic forces.

The best way to fight is to propagate the peaceful pursuit of our own religions and convert persons lacking in morality to our respective viewpoints.

May the propagation of morality become a national issue in our respective countries so that future generations will remember us with affection.

But as we say in Australia 'give people a fair go'. Which is the basis of our multiculturalism. It is impossible to translate the full meaning of 'a fair go' in your respective language, so you will have to search your language for the vernacular speech of developing fairness that undoubtedly exists at grassroots levels.

So the impossible dream may not be so far away if we can wish all persons to be given 'a fair go'.

May you be well and happy and free from harm and successful in your pursuit of what we in Australia term 'a fair go' for all".

As an example of this idea of a 'Fair- go", is seen in our Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001. This act came into effect in January 2002. It clearly defines it as objectives in Part 1, point 4, Objects of Act:

- (a) To promote the full and equal participation of every person in a society that values freedom of expression and is an open and multicultural democracy;
- (b) To maintain the right of all Victorians to engage in robust discussion of any matter of public interest to engage in, or comment on, any form of artistic expression, discussion of religious issues or academic debate where such discussion, expression, debate or comment does not vilify or marginalise any person or class of persons;
- (c) To promote conciliation and resolve tensions between persons who (as a result of their ignorance to the attributes of others and the effect that their conduct may have on others) vilify others on the grounds of race or religious belief or activity and those who are vilified.

An example of what the Buddha said about other religions is clearly defined in the advice given by King Asoka to Buddhist missionaries as quoted in the book "What Buddhists Believe" by K. Sri Dhammananda;

'One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religion of others, but one should honor others' religions for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honors his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking, 'I will glorify my own religion.' But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely, so concord is good. Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others.'

The fundamental teachings of the Buddha are to remove suffering for all beings.

His advice is to not engage in any action that is harmful to one's self or others; and only to engage in actions that are beneficial to one's self or others.

His reason for saying this is because, the Law of Cause and Effect as expounded by the Buddha state that our world both physical and mental are a result of an individual's activity. That is the activity of our thoughts, body and speech. For example, in order to experience peace now and in the future, one must act in peace now, ...mentally, verbally and with our body actions.

The analogy is given as follows...if one wants to eat apples, one plants an apple seed....not an orange seed...similarly, if one wants peace, one plants the seeds of peace.

From the Dhammapada, the Book of Sayings of the Buddha, Verse:

“do no evil, do only good, purify one’s mind”

The Buddha

The Oxford English dictionary, 2nd edition, 1989, Oxford University Press. Defines tolerance as “The action or practice of enduring or sustaining pain or hardship; the power or capacity of enduring; endurance.”

“One who tolerates opinions or practices different from his own;

“Allowance (with or without limitations) by the ruling power, of the exercise of religion otherwise than in the form officially established or recognized.”

“Tolerationism – Toleration of religious differences as a principle or system.”

Tolerance allows us to generate respect for other’s beliefs, and philosophies, it allows us to have the willingness to understand the culture and personality of others. It gives us permission to find a way to allow differences to be respected. It is bright and clear, not clouded by aversion to diversity. It is not afraid of differences, it is not afraid to listen.

Tolerance accepts the differences that exist in the world. It accepts that others do think and act differently to oneself - even within our own family - brothers and sisters born together, still can be opposites in personalities and belief systems, yet we still love each other.

In the Digha Nikaya, the Lord Buddha expounded the Cakkvatti-Sihanda Suttanta. In this Sutta, the Lord Buddha gives instructions on how to rule a Kingdom to bring peace.

The Buddha’s advice was to show respect to all religions, not to disparage or slander them.

King Asoka was a great Indian King, who after winning many battles, questioned the price of victory against the suffering sustained in human life.

His analysis led to him rejecting violence and turning to the Buddha’s Teachings of non-violence to rule his country.

“Towards all religious sects he adopted a policy of respect and guaranteed them full freedom to live according to their own principles, but he also urged them to exert themselves for the “increase of their inner worthiness”.

He suggested respect for the creeds of others, condoned praise, the good points of others, and suggested to refrain from vehement adverse criticism of the

viewpoints of others”. Page 41 BDDR Vol 6 No. 1 an excerpt from the paper written by John D. Hughes titled Recollection by Dharma of the Danda of the Venerable King Asoka.

Respect is described in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as: “Differential regard or esteem felt or shown towards a person or thing; the condition or state of being esteemed or honoured; Differential or courteous attention; actions expressive of respect of a person, politeness, courteous; to show polite attention to a person; treat or regard with deference, esteem or honour”;

The Buddha respected all religions and told his disciples to do the same. Do not disparage one’s own or another’s religion is one of the vows that Vajrayana Buddhist practitioner’s take. He instructed to see things for oneself as advised in the Kalama Sutta.

From the book, ‘What Buddhists Believe by Venerable K. Sri Dhammadnanda:

‘The Buddha stood for rationalism, democracy and practical, ethical conduct in religion. He introduced this religion for people to practice with human dignity.

The followers of the Buddha were advised not to believe anything without considering it properly. In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha gave this advice:

..., when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and bad: tending to harm yourself of others, reject them.

'And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good: conducive to the spiritual welfare of yourself as well as others, accept and follow them.'

Buddhists are advised to accept religious practices only after careful observation and analysis, and only after being certain that the method agrees with reason and is conducive to the good of one and all.”

The Buddha’s first instructions in the Metta Sutta is to be harmless to all beings; small or big, seen or unseen, weak or strong, near or far. He teaches the path of harmlessness, to make sure that our behavior, of body action and speech action is harmless.

The world today is becoming more out of control with individuals doing atrocious acts. It will take all religions to unite and work together to bring our collective goodness to human kind.

May Tolerance and Respect flourish towards all religions.

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