



"Look on the world as a bubble, look on it as a mirage; then the King of Death cannot even see you. Come look at this world! Is it not like a painted royal chariot? The wise see through it, but not the foolish." (Buddha, *Dhammapada* 170-171)

Empty Mountains

Finding the Middle Way

A Christian-Buddhist Interfaith Dialogue
moderated by Konchog Nyima

(Revised February 15th, 2021)

The Two Truths of the Middle Way between Extremes

That there is a self has been taught, and the doctrine of no-self, by the Buddhas, as well as the doctrine of neither self nor nonself.¹

| | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Non-existence (~2) | The Middle Way (+2) | Existence (x2) |
| No 'Self' At All (~2) | Emptiness ~(x2) Appearance ~(~2) | Inherent Self (x2) |

(Gross) Conventional Truth

Before practicing meditation, we see that mountains are mountains.

Ultimate Truth

When we start to practice, we see that mountains are no longer mountains.

(Subtle) Conventional Truth

After practicing a while, we see that mountains are again mountains.

Union of the Two Truths

Now the mountains are very free. Our mind is still with the mountains, but it is no longer bound to anything. The mountains in the third stage are not the same as those in the first.²

¹ Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 18:6; trans. Jay L. Garfield, p. 249.

² Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion: Commentaries on the Prajñāparamita Diamond Sutra*, p. 56.

Contents

| | |
|--|--------------|
| <i>The Two Truths of the Middle Way between Extremes</i> | (p. 2) |
| <i>Welcome</i> | (p. 4) |
| <i>The Razor's Edge</i> | (p. 5) |
| <i>What is the Difference?</i> | (p. 12) |
| <i>Suffering</i> | (p. 14) |
| <i>Carnal Desire</i> | (pp. 15, 17) |
| <i>Inherent Self</i> | (p. 18) |
| <i>Ignorance of Interdependence</i> | (pp. 19, 23) |
| <i>Impermanence</i> | (p. 25) |
| <i>Enlightenment = Annihilation?</i> | (p. 27) |
| <i>Nirvana = Annihilation?</i> | (p. 28) |
| <i>Nirvana = Universal Consciousness?</i> | (p. 30) |
| <i>Individuality</i> | (p. 32) |
| <i>Selflessness</i> | (p. 33) |
| <i>Continuity of Consciousness</i> | (p. 34) |
| <i>Continuity & Reincarnation</i> | (p. 35) |
| <i>Nirvana = Extinction of Individuality?</i> | (p. 37) |
| <i>Reincarnation</i> | (p. 39) |
| <i>Emptiness</i> | (p. 40) |
| <i>Impermanence vs. Permanence</i> | (p. 42) |
| <i>Desire vs. Carnal Desire</i> | (p. 44) |
| <i>Detachment & Compassion</i> | (p. 45) |
| <i>Morality</i> | (pp. 49, 54) |
| <i>The Relativity of Time</i> | (p. 57) |
| <i>Nirvana = Cosmic Void?</i> | (p. 59) |
| <i>Creator God</i> | (p. 61) |
| <i>Nirvana & Individuality</i> | (p. 62) |
| <i>Buddha-nature vs. The Image of God</i> | (p. 63) |
| <i>What the Buddha Taught</i> | (p. 65) |
| <i>The Discipline of Loving God with Our Minds</i> | (p. 66) |
| <i>The Emptiness of Biblical Hermeneutics</i> | (p. 69) |

Welcome

This apologetic text was developed in order to respond to some of the philosophical objections to Buddhist teachings (called Dharma), including the doctrines of *impermanence*, *suffering*, and *selflessness*. Quotes have been taken from a number of published Christian works on world religions such as *Jesus Among Other Gods* by the famous apologist Ravi Zacharias, with ‘responses’ by prominent Buddhist teachers such as the Dalai Lama.

Apologetics is “the branch of theology having to do with the defense and proofs of Christianity.” An apology, in the theological sense, is “a formal justification” of a religious belief. My primary concern with this comparative work is to defend Buddhism against the many misinterpretations found in Christian polemical material. Sorted by topic, this book presents an interfaith dialogue of sorts that describes (in their own words) how many evangelical Christians misperceive Buddhism, and how Buddhists might have responded (again, in their own words). Their quotes on *nirvana* and *emptiness* are a rare find and represent the *crème de la crème* of Buddhist teachings. It is my hope that *Empty Mountains* will provide a much-needed clarity!



“Because He Himself [in His humanity] has suffered in being tempted, He is able to help and provide immediate assistance to those who are being tempted and exposed to suffering.”
(Hebrews 2:18, Amp.)

The Razor's Edge

The middle way (*madhyama-pratipad* in Sanskrit) is the foundation of all Buddhist teachings. It was discovered some 2,500 years ago by the young prince Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha-to-be, during his search for the answer to the sufferings of sickness, ageing, death, and rebirth. Having been raised in luxury, he found that indulgence in pleasures is superficial, because a life lived in excess brings no lasting happiness. Therefore, to escape samsara (i.e., cyclic existence), he tried giving up 'all' pleasures, hoping that the end of suffering would come if he could suppress 'every' desire.

After leaving his princely life, Siddhartha chose a life of extreme austerity along with five other ascetics who were living in the forest, exposed to the elements. However, six years after beginning his spiritual journey, Siddhartha was on the verge of death due to self-mortification and denial of his body's most basic requirements for sustenance. It is said that at one point, his daily nourishment consisted of just one sesame seed, one grain of rice, and one drop of water. Having taken asceticism to its furthest extreme, Siddhartha's body wasted away to mere skin and bones, and he no longer possessed the strength to meditate. He had gone too far, and there was still no relief for his existential pain.

Lying emaciated along the side of a riverbank, he overheard an elder musician on a passing boat teaching his pupil how to properly tune a musical instrument: "If you tighten the string too much, it will snap. And if you leave it too slack, it won't play." Siddhartha recognized himself in the instruction, for he too had

lived both the ‘slack’ life of hedonism and also now the imbalanced life of asceticism which was about to ‘break’ him. Inspired by the lesson of the tempered string, he saw the fault and futility of both extremes and realized a path of moderation (i.e., neither self-indulgence nor self-mortification), which he called “the middle way.”

Buddha explains the middle way by refuting the two extremes. (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Ocean of Nectar: Wisdom and Compassion in Mahayana Buddhism*, p. 58)

| Asceticism | The Middle Way | Hedonism |
|--------------------|--|-----------------|
| Self-mortification | <p style="text-align: center;">Not Hedonism Not Asceticism</p> | Self-indulgence |

There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the Middle Way realized by the Tathagata—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding. (Buddha, *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta* 1:2)

Thus, true renunciation has two aspects: recognizing that external objects are not a true source of *happiness* (i.e., such as when

Siddhartha renounced his princely life), and also recognizing that external objects are not the main cause of *suffering* (i.e., such as when Siddhartha renounced asceticism).

We need inner peace, but we also need good physical health, and for this we need certain external conditions such as food and a comfortable environment to live in. There are many people who concentrate exclusively on developing the material side of their life, while completely ignoring their spiritual practice. This is one extreme. However, there are other people who concentrate exclusively on spiritual practice, while ignoring the material conditions necessary for supporting a healthy human life. This is another extreme. We need to maintain a middle way that avoids both extremes of materialism and spiritualism. (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Transform Your Life: A Blissful Journey*, p. 10)

Now abandoning both self-indulgence *and* self-mortification, Siddhartha accepted his first decent meal in years, and he found that it only helped his mental focus and meditative concentration. Having restored his body and mind to health with this new perspective, Siddhartha now had not only the physical strength but also the correct view so as to reach enlightenment. Having uprooted the root causes of suffering, he taught the world the middle way between the two extremes of existence and non-existence (discussed later), although he knew that few would understand his words.

It is this middle view that seems to have no place in our everyday, dualistic language. We habitually polarize life as being “all or nothing.” Therefore, we say *desire* or *no desire*, and we say *self* or *no self*. We think that there are only two possibilities, and even among those who study and practice Buddhism, the four noble truths are often read as though nirvana comes through the “extinction of *all* desires.” This absurdly causes us to characterize the four noble truths as promoting asceticism! What happened to the middle? In his *Friendly Letter* (vv.61-62), Nagarjuna says that the wisdom of the middle way is not made known by any other religion: “Ask if they propound what passes beyond ‘is’ and ‘is not’. Thereby know that the ambrosia of the Buddhas’ teaching is called profound, an uncommon doctrine passing far beyond existence and non-existence.”

For that reason—that the Dharma is deep and difficult to understand and to learn—the Buddha’s mind despaired of being able to teach it. (Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 24:12; trans. Jay L. Garfield, p. 301)

Sitting under the Bodhi Tree, Siddhartha applied the two truths of the middle way to every philosophical question, including the nature of the self. He came to reject the existence of an *atman*, understood either as a self-supporting, substantially existent self existing *independently* of the five aggregates of body and mind or, more subtly, as an inherently existent (or objectively findable) self that exists somewhere *within* the aggregates or even as the *collection* of those aggregates. Instead, Buddha taught *anatman* (literally, ‘no-self,’), but by this he merely meant “no *atman*.” The

doctrine of 'selflessness' is too often overapplied because first we try to translate *atman* simply as 'self,' and so then we think that *anatman* is meant to negate *every* notion of self!

The Sanskrit word *atman* denotes an independent or inherently existent self, so it is best translated in a way that carries these connotations, rather than just the misleading single word *self*, which is an oversimplification. Similarly, *anatman* should also be rendered into English as a phrase: "no independent self" or "no inherent self." However, with the doctrine of no-self, Buddhists do not go so far as to mean a rejection of the conventional self, which will be explained below. Thinking that we can affirm nothing at all when we negate *atman* causes us to over negate and leads to nihilism. However, Buddha never negates the middle view, only the two extremes flanking it. Each of the extremes is only a half-truth: eternalism is *conventional truth without ultimate truth*, and nihilism is *ultimate truth without conventional truth*. We usually fall to the extreme of eternalism.

The essential point of the middle way is the union of the two truths. (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Great Treasury of Merit: How to Rely Upon a Spiritual Guide*, p. 252)

Take as an example, a mountain. The mountain is composed of tons of rock, dirt, soil, etc., all piled together. You call it one thing, "a mountain," but it is really an aggregation of many things. The mountain has an unimaginably high degree of complexity, but to simply know it as a 'mountain,' we give it a singular name or label. Paradoxically, this makes things appear to be *more* than what they really are! Meditate on this: does it really exist as a mountain *in-and-of itself*? When all the rocks, dirt, and soil were

built up together through plate tectonics, did they really become a mountain, or is it just a concept in our mind?

Ultimately, the mountain lacks an essence—it is selfless. However, we *do* agree that it is a ‘mountain’ and not something else. So, there is a conventional truth of there being a mountain, but if we try to locate the so-called mountain apart from the rocks, dirt, and soil, etc., we would ultimately come up “empty.”

To not present Buddhism within this symmetrical framework is actually quite irresponsible, but understandable—there are no readily available words to express the Middle Way which do not carry nihilistic or eternalistic connotations. (“Selflessness” and “emptiness” sound quite ominous, don’t they?) In fact, everything about this mysterious center is rather illusive and foreign to our dualistic predispositions. Yet, by not refuting the Dharma on these terms, one misses the point of the Buddha’s teachings entirely. Therefore, in these responses I will continuously point out when an interpretation has been skewed by the all-too-easy characterization of Buddhism as one extreme or another.

So, what does it mean to say “empty mountains”? Thich Nhat Hanh’s words quoted on page 2 can be understood in the following manner: “*Before practicing meditation, we see that mountains are mountains,*” is a reference to the extreme of inherent existence. Next are the two truths of the middle way: “*When we start to practice, we see that mountains are no longer mountains,*” is a reference to ultimate truth, and “*After practicing a while, we see that mountains are again mountains*” is a reference to conventional truth (after ultimate truth has been realized). Thich Nhat Hanh

concludes by saying, “*Now the mountains are very free. Our mind is still with the mountains, but it is no longer bound to anything.*” This is a reference to the union of the two truths of the middle way, which is the liberating view of an enlightened being.

Instead of making others right or wrong, or bottling up right and wrong in ourselves, there’s a middle way, a very powerful middle way. We could see it as sitting on the razor’s edge, not falling off to the right or the left. This middle way involves not hanging on to our version so tightly. It involves keeping our hearts and minds open long enough to entertain the idea that when we make things wrong, we do it out of a desire to obtain some kind of ground or security. Equally, when we make things right, we are still trying to obtain some kind of ground or security. Could our minds and our hearts be big enough just to hang out in that space where we’re not entirely certain about who’s right and who’s wrong? Could we have no agenda when we walk into a room with another person, not know what to say, not make that person wrong or right? Could we see, hear, feel other people as they really are? It is powerful to practice this way, because we’ll find ourselves continually rushing around to try to feel secure again—to make ourselves or them either right or wrong. But true communication can happen only in that open space. (Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*, p. 109)

What is the Difference?

What makes the Buddhist message unique? The following outline shows the parallels between the Christian and Buddhist explanations for suffering, its cause, and its remedy. Amazingly, they run almost exactly the same, except for one point: *the root cause of suffering*. That is, both Christianity and Buddhism identify the same direct and indirect causes of suffering, but only Buddhism specifies the fundamental error which gives rise to it all.

| Christianity | Buddhism |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Suffering ("No Jesus, No Peace") | Suffering (<i>dukkha, duhkha</i>) |
| Sin (temptation, lust) | Carnal Desire (<i>tanha, trishna</i>) |
| Selfishness (will, rebelliousness) | Inherent Self (<i>atta, atman</i>) |
| ??? | Ignorance (<i>avijja, avidya</i>) |

My question to the Christian is, "What causes selfishness?" What makes you put yourself first? On what basis does an individual come to an exaggerated estimation of its place in the universe? One cannot simply answer "pride" or "ambition," for these are on the same level as the ego. And, we cannot simply repeat ourselves by citing "temptation" (lust) or "original sin" (precipitated by rebellion). What, after having been created in the "Image of God," disposed Adam and Eve to a fallen nature?

Why is this question so important? If you cannot identify the root cause, you cannot prescribe an efficient remedy. There will be

relief of some symptoms, but the fundamental 'seed of iniquity' will remain. Buddhism, in answering the question "What causes selfishness?" provides a fuller, more comprehensive answer to the question of suffering.

In the following pages, we will work down the list of the causes of suffering, examining each step and its relation to the one above it. Once we have traced back the fundamental cause of suffering (ignorance), we will move back up again resulting in the cessation of suffering.

By ignorance we do not mean a simple lack of information. Rather we mean a false vision of reality that makes us think that things we see around us are permanent and solid, or that our egos are real. This leads us to mistake fleeting pleasures or the alleviation of pain for lasting happiness. Such ignorance also makes us build our happiness on others' misery. We are drawn to what satisfies our ego, and are repulsed by what might harm it. Thus, little by little, we create ever greater mental confusion until we behave in a totally egocentric manner. Ignorance perpetuates itself, and our inner peace is destroyed. Buddhism's form of knowledge, being the basic antidote to ignorance, is the final antidote to suffering. (Mattieu Ricard, *The Quantum and the Lotus: a Journey to the Frontiers where Science and Buddhism Meet*, p. 12)

Suffering

Romans 8:18-23 says that the entire world “groans” and that all men suffer because of sin. Romans 5 tells us that when Adam sinned, he infected the entire bloodstream of humanity with sickness and suffering and death. (Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, p. 88)

Now this, monks, is the noble truth of suffering (duhkha): Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are suffering; association with the unbeloved is suffering, separation from the loved is suffering, not getting what is wanted is suffering. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are suffering. (Buddha, *Dhammacakkavattana Sutta* 1:4)

The exact meaning of the First Noble Truth is this: Life (in the condition that it has got itself into) is dislocated. Something has gone wrong. It is out of joint. Its pivot is not true, friction (interpersonal conflict) is excessive, movement (creativity) is blocked, and it hurts. (Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, p. 101)

Carnal Desire (Part 1)

Buddha correctly observed that suffering comes from a desire for the things of this world. Christians call these desires temptation. James 1:13-15 points out that man is enticed from within, by “evil desires,” “lusts,” and passions or appetites which tend to get out of control. When a person yields to these temptations, he sins. The result of sin is spiritual suffering and death (see Romans 6:23). (Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, pp. 88-89)

Tanha is usually translated as “desire.” There is some truth in this... But if we try to make desire *tanha*'s equivalent, we run into difficulties. To begin with, the equivalence would make this Second Noble Truth unhelpful, for to shut down desires, all desires, in our present state would be to die, and to die is not to solve life's problem. But beyond being unhelpful, the claim of equivalence would be flatly wrong, for there are some desires the Buddha explicitly advocated—the desire for liberation, for example, or for the happiness of others. *Tanha* is a specific kind of desire, the desire for private fulfillment. When we are selfless we are free, but that is precisely the difficulty—to maintain that state. *Tanha* is the force that ruptures it, pulling us back from the freedom of the all to seek fulfillment in our egos, which ooze like secret sores. *Tanha* consists of all “those inclinations which tend to continue separateness, the separate existence of the subject of desire; in fact, all forms of selfishness, the essence of which is desire for self at the expense, if necessary, of all other forms of life. Life being one, all that tends to separate one aspect from another must cause suffering to the unit which even unconsciously works against the Law. Our duty to our fellows is

to understand them as extensions, other aspects, of ourselves— fellows facets of the same Reality.” (Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions*, pp. 102-103; quoting Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism*, p. 91)

In short, we need others for our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Without others we are nothing. Our sense that we are an island, and independent, self-sufficient individual, bears no relation to reality. It is closer to the truth to pictures ourself as a cell in the vast body of life, distinct yet intimately bound up with all living beings. We cannot exist without others, and they in turn are affected by everything we do. The idea that it is possible to secure our own welfare while neglecting the welfare of others, or even at the expense of others, is completely unrealistic. (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Eight Steps to Happiness: The Buddhist Way of Loving Kindness*, pp. 56-67)

Carnal Desire (Part 2)

Buddha taught that desire is the source of suffering. Therefore, he contended, in order to eliminate suffering we must eliminate desire. Such a goal is obviously difficult to attain, since it requires desiring to eliminate desire. Gently point out that Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). According to Jesus, then, the issue is having the right desire, not eliminating desire altogether. (Dean Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, p. 64)

Not all desires are desirous attachment. It is important to distinguish between virtuous and non-virtuous desires. Virtuous and compassionate desires are not delusions because they do not destroy our peace of mind. For example, a sincere wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others is a desire, but it is not desirous attachment because such a wish cannot confuse and disturb our mind and it cannot harm ourself and others. (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Joyful Path of Good Fortune: The Complete Buddhist Path to Enlightenment*, p. 313)

Inherent Self

The Bible also declares men are sinners by choice. In the biblical view, sin is basically rebellion against God. (Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, p. 88)

Sin is any thought or deed contrary to the will of God. Man is spiritually dead in sin (Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12; Ephesians 2:1). (Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, p. 92)

For you have said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the clouds; I will be like the Most High." (Isaiah 14:13-14, NKJ)

In the early phase of Buddhism, *trishna* by itself was regarded as the cause of suffering and therefore of imprisonment in the cycle of existence. However, elimination of suffering was an insufficient explanation for liberation from the cycle, and a further teaching, that of egolessness (*anatman*) was brought in: the fact that the personality is seen as an independent self-existing *I* or ego (*atman*) leads to placing special value on everything connected with it, and this is what gives rise to desire or craving. Liberation results from everything that is erroneously regarded as pertaining to an independently existing ego being recognized as inessential—this causes desire to fall away. (Michael Kohn, *Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, p. 232)

Ignorance of Interdependence (Part 1)

One cannot talk about the cessation of suffering without also giving the origin of the first wrong thought. (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, p. 123)

Buddha taught that the only way to rid oneself of selfish desire was through self-effort. For centuries, his followers have tried to stay on the Eightfold Path, but many have found that “the heart is deceitful above all things... and beyond cure. Who can stand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) and will sabotage the best of human intentions... The problem with Buddhism is that its goals are beyond man’s ability to reach. Jesus set the same kind of standards, but He also gives strength to live a life that is pleasing to God... Christ does not simply give the Christian a list of commandments and orders to obey. He promises to help the Christian grow and change and develop, just as a vine, a bush, or a tree grows under proper care. The Buddhist on the other hand, has eight guidelines for the right way to live, but Buddha promises him no power to live that way. And Buddha has no real authority for saying these eight steps are right, noble as these eight steps may sound. Christ says, “I am the way” (John 14:6) and He proved His power and authority by rising from the dead. That same power and authority is available to Christians, but many Christians never fully realize what Christ can do for them because they don’t really live their lives in Him. (Fritz Ridenour, *So What’s the Difference?*, pp. 88, 90, 91)

Saying that the Buddha had “no authority” for presenting the Eightfold Path is an ad hominem argument, attacking the person rather than what they are asserting.

Only Buddhism identifies the “origin of the first wrong thought,” a wrong view of self, and calls this ignorance. The antidote to this ignorance is wisdom (prajña). It is important that you do not think this wisdom only deals with philosophy or metaphysics, and therefore has no relevance to everyday living. Every afflictive emotion and every instance of suffering in your life can be traced back to this lack of insight: everything is impermanent (anitya) and lacks an inherent self (atman).



Genuine freedom and liberation can only be achieved when our fundamental ignorance, our habitual misapprehension of the nature of reality, is totally overcome. This ignorance, which underlies all our emotional and cognitive states, is the root factor that binds us to the perpetual cycle of life and death in samsara. (Dalai Lama, *The World of Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 10)



What is this ignorance? We are ignorant of the true nature of phenomena: that they arise by means of causes and conditions, which means they exist by virtue of interdependence, and that this makes them impermanent. Under a veil of delusion, we see people and phenomena as being self-existent. However, existence comes from conditions, not from self. That phenomena do not exist “from their own side” is one way of expressing the truth of dependent origination. The crux of it all is this: being ignorant of the dependent nature of things, we see them as

independent. Being ignorant of the composite modality of things, we see them as solid and concrete. Thought to be self-existent, everything must possess its own essence, sort of like Plato's theory of forms.

Essence, or inherent nature, is also the imagined object of attachment and aversion. We seek after essence in both objects and persons because it seems to promise non-impermanence (our "vision of perfection") which is a counterfeit permanence. It is sort of an "existential idolatry." This is ignorance, the root cause of suffering. Therefore, the problem of suffering and its cessation is not a matter of will-power (resistance of temptation), but of Right View, the first step on the Eightfold Path. When we understand that nothing possesses an essential self, then we will have nothing to grasp after, and our restless suffering will disappear as a result. During times of temptation, every fiber of one's being is shouting, "This is it!" In the heat of the moment, simply analyze to see if this promised essence is really there. Once insight into emptiness is generated, you will see the situation for what it is and realize "It's not all that..." Then, the associated afflictive emotions will lose all appeal.

•

[All] phenomena are empty and devoid of inherent existence. This axiom tells us that although our normal perception leads us to believe that things are permanent and real, and enjoy some kind of independent existence, through analysis we find that in reality they lack these qualities. We therefore discover that any perception suggesting that things exist inherently and independently is a false perception, and that only insight into emptiness can cut through this misperception and dispel it. Many of the negative thoughts and emotions which take root in our flawed way of viewing reality will therefore be eliminated when

this insight is generated, and when we see through our perceptions and recognize them to be false. (Dalai Lama, *Transforming the Mind*, pp. 29-30)

Ignorance of Interdependence (Part 2)

You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you... Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. (Ezekiel 28:15, 17; NKJ)

Can one resist asking, How does a world-view that considers everything to be impermanent even explain the origin of impermanence and the seduction of the mind to see these as permanent? (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: the Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, p. 122)

If you perceive self without impermanence, then of course you will believe in a permanent self! It is this false absolute which seduces the mind. Impermanence is merely a conventional label for the arising, abiding, and dissolution of conditioned phenomena. Therefore, for anything to exist, it is dependent on conditions which themselves are constantly changing.



Whatever is dependently co-arisen, that is explained to be emptiness... Something that is not dependently arisen, such a thing does not exist. Therefore, a nonempty thing does not exist. (Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 24:18a, 19; trans. Jay L. Garfield, p. 304)

Dependent origination is itself conventional because it is not produced through any intrinsic being. (Candrakirti, *Prasannapada* 11)

All the mental and physical phenomena that we experience appear as if they existed in and of themselves, utterly independent of our modes of perception and conception. They appear to be inherently existing things, but in reality they exist as dependently related events. Their dependence is threefold: (1) phenomena arise in dependence upon preceding causal influences, (2) they exist in dependence upon their own parts and/or attributes, and (3) the phenomena that make up the world of our experience are dependent upon our verbal and conceptual designations of them. This threefold dependence is not intuitively obvious, for it is concealed by the appearance of phenomena as being self-sufficient and independent of conceptual designation. On the basis of these misleading appearances it is quite natural to think of, or conceptually apprehend, phenomena as self-defining things in themselves. This tendency is known as reification, and according to the Madhyamaka view, this is an inborn delusion that provides the basis for a host of mental afflictions. (B. Alan Wallace, *Consciousness at the Crossroads: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on Brain Science and Buddhism*, pp. 156-157)

Look on the world as a bubble, look on it as a mirage; then the King of Death cannot even see you. Come look at this world! Is it not like a painted royal chariot? The wise see through it, but not the foolish. (Buddha, *Dhammapada* 170-171; trans. by Eknath Easwaran)

Impermanence

Buddhism does begin with an analysis of the world of appearances and especially of man. As with Hinduism Buddhism sees the cycle of reincarnation as shot through with pain, largely because life is characterized by impermanence. (Steven Cory, *The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error 2: World Religions*)

Everything is impermanent and ever-changing (the doctrine of anicca). We suffer because we desire those things that are impermanent. The way to liberate oneself from suffering is to eliminate all desire. We must stop craving that which is impermanent. (Dean Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, p. 58)

Hinduism argued by saying that behind the world of the transitory or nonreal lies what is ultimately real. Buddhism reversed that by saying that behind the real world is actually impermanence. Thus, the reason for all our cravings is that because we think there is permanence, we have cravings. Once we know there is nothing permanent, not even the self, then we stop craving. In the state of "Enlightenment," the self is extinguished and all desire, and therefore, suffering, is gone. That is the goal of Buddhism. (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: the Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, pp. 121-122)

Impermanence in and of itself does not cause suffering. Only when we are ignorant of impermanence and seek fulfillment in ephemeral things do we suffer, for they lack the permanence which we are after. The universe is illusory only in the sense that we perceive things as being self-existent. When one becomes enlightened, it is not that

impermanence (or the world) disappears, but that we become aware of impermanence and relate to the world the way it really is rather than the way our deluded minds constantly mistake it.



To be in samsara is to see things as they appear to deluded consciousness and to interact with them accordingly. To be in nirvana, then, is to see those things as they are—as merely empty, dependent, impermanent, and nonsubstantial, but not to be somewhere else, seeing something else. (Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 332)

There is no difference at all between samsara and nirvana; there is no difference at all between nirvana and samsara. (Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 25:19; trans. Jay L. Garfield, p. 318)

Whoever sees dependent arising also sees suffering, and its arising, and its cessation as well as the path. (Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 24:40; trans. Jay L. Garfield, p. 318)

Enlightenment = Annihilation?

Another benefit of God's being personal has to do with the issue of permanence. Buddha taught that permanence can be found only in the Void. As Christians, we can agree that we need to base our lives on that which is permanent. The problem with the Buddhist concept of permanence, though, is that, when we find permanence in the Void, we as individuals cease to exist. Before we can find permanence, we must disappear into the Void. Because in Christianity God is personal, we can find permanence in Him without the undesirable consequence of having to deny our value and existence as persons. The result of salvation is not the individual disappearing into the Void, but being joined in an interpersonal relationship with God. (Dean Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, pp. 64-65)

To get rid of ignorance, one meditates on selflessness. This will decrease the strength of delusion, and eventually eliminate the mind that is not in accordance with reality. The question then arises, "What happens then? Does one reach a state which is completely free from suffering? Does it lead to the end of the person's continuum?" All of that is uncomfortable to think about. This is said not to be the case. All that one gets rid of is the mistaken state of mind that is the cause of suffering. Without the causes of suffering, the person will not experience the suffering. The person remains, but has rid himself or herself of a mistaken state of mind and the problems which ensue from that. (Ven. Lobsang Gyatso, *The Four Noble Truths*, p. 64)

Nirvana = Annihilation?

Those who reach nirvana are freed forever from all the anxieties, fears, and desires that possess ordinary people; they are freed “from the eternal round of decay, suffering, and death.” They will never be born again. It is a state of mind marked in this life by “a sense of liberation, inward peace and strength, insight into truth, the joy of complete oneness with reality, and love toward all creatures in the universe.” After death, there is total annihilation. (Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 309)

You become one with the Impersonal, the state of Nirvana. It is often described as the blowing out of a candle. You lose all personality and awareness and merge into “nothingness.” At this point, Buddha said, you will be at peace. But it is always at the loss of your own soul and personality. (Ron Carlson and Ed Decker, *Fast Facts on False Teachings*, pp. 24-25)

When one has freed the mind, the gods cannot trace him, even though they think: “This is the consciousness attached to the enlightened one (Buddha).” And why? It is because the enlightened one is untraceable. Although I say this, there are some recluses and religious teachers who misrepresent me falsely, contrary to fact, saying: “The monk Gotama (Buddha) is a nihilist because he teaches the cutting off, the destruction, the disappearance of the existing entity.” But this is exactly what I do not say. Both now and in the past, I simply teach suffering and the overcoming of suffering. (Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta No. 22)

As a word, *nirvana* is negative. It means “to blow out,” as one would extinguish a fire, and the Buddha often describes it as putting out, cooling, or quenching the fires of self-will and selfish passion. But the force of the word is entirely positive. Like the English *flawless*, it expresses perfection as the absence of any fault. Perfection, the Buddha implies, is our real nature. All we have to do is remove the veil of self-centeredness that covers it. (Eknath Easwaran, *The Dhammapada*, pp. 57-58)

What is selfless is empty of or lacks a certain type of self (Tibetan *bdag*, Sanskrit *atman*). A fundamental assertion in Buddhism is that only through understanding selflessness, or emptiness (*stong pa nyid*, *shunyata*), can one gain liberation and thereby be relieved of powerless rebirth into the suffering of cyclic existence. The nature of selflessness is variously identified in the different Buddhist systems, but all agree that: “Phenomena are selfless in the sense that they are empty of being a permanent, partless, independent self or of being the object of use of such a self.” The higher philosophical schools describe some forms of selflessness that are more subtle, more difficult to pierce, than those asserted in lower schools. Still, in each case the assertion of a lack of self is not a theory of nihilism, that phenomena do not exist at all, but an identification that phenomena lack certain qualities that they are incorrectly assumed to have. It is precisely these misapprehended, non-existent qualities that constitute the self the Buddhists deny in the theory of selflessness. (*Debate in Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 267-268; quoting Sopa and Hopkins, *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 68)

Nirvana = Universal Consciousness?

Such a concept of nirvana is slightly different than the one embraced by the Brahmans of Siddhartha's day and by modern Hindus. Brahmanism/Hinduism teaches that nirvana is reached when an individual soul is united with the Universal Soul. This might be comparable to a raindrop (individual soul) falling into the ocean (Universal Soul). The Buddha, on the other hand, believed that nirvana is reached when, like a candle flame being blown out, a soul's elements, along with all individuality are extinguished. (Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, pp. 309-310)

In Buddhism, universal consciousness is completely refuted. There is no universal consciousness. Consciousness is always individual. Buddhism does not accept any concept of an all-encompassing consciousness of which our consciousness is a part. It is very important to understand that individuality is on every level, as I have explained. There is nothing cosmic or universal that goes beyond this individual consciousness. (Dalai Lama, *Buddha Nature*, p. 59)

Our minds are related to buddhahood (they are not separate from buddhahood) in the sense that this is something that we will gradually attain by the systematic purification of our minds. Hence, by purifying our minds step by step, we will eventually attain the state of buddhahood. And that Buddha which we will eventually become is of the same continuity as ourselves. But that Buddha which we will become is different, for example, from Shakyamuni Buddha. They are two distinct persons. We cannot

attain Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, because that is His own individual thing. (Dalai Lama, *Bodhgaya Interviews*, pp. 49-50)

Individuality

At the heart of Buddhism is the loss of the concept of self because Buddhism's fundamental doctrine is that there's no essential nature of self—anatman. Hinduism talked of atman, the essential self. Anatman is the non-essential self. How wonderful to know that when Jesus Christ speaks to you and to me, he enables you to understand yourself, to die to that self because of the cross, and brings the real you to birth. When you're crucified with Christ nevertheless you live, yet not you, but Christ lives in you. He retains the individuality and the identity, but brings it to fruition in your identity in the person of Christ. I think that's so unique that one cannot escape the ramifications. (Ravi Zacharias, *What Makes the Christian Message Unique?*)

Consciousness will always be present, though a particular consciousness may cease. For example, the particular tactile consciousness that is present within this human body will cease when the body comes to an end. Likewise, consciousnesses that are influenced by ignorance, by anger or by attachment, these too will cease. Furthermore, all of the courser levels of consciousness will cease. But the basic, ultimate, innermost subtle consciousness will always remain. It had no beginning, and it will have no end. That consciousness will remain. When we reach Buddhahood, that consciousness becomes enlightened all-knowing. Still, the consciousness will remain an individual thing. (Dalai Lama, *The Bodhgaya Interviews*, p. 46)

Selflessness

One cannot affirm the absence of a self while individualizing nirvana. (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: the Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, p. 123)

Wherever the term “self” occurs, it is necessary to determine which meaning of self is appropriate to the context. I, person, and self are, in general, synonyms. However, the self of “selflessness” is not synonymous with “person,” but means inherent existence, the existence of something as covering its basis of designation. That type of “self” does not exist, whereas the self that is synonymous with “person” and “I” is the conventionally existent person. Thus, when Jang-gya speaks about reasonings for ascertaining the selflessness of persons, he is speaking of reasonings for ascertaining that persons are without inherent existence. (Jeffrey Hopkins, *Emptiness Yoga: the Tibetan Middle Way*, p. 209)

Continuity of Consciousness

In regard to the samsara cycle (reincarnation), while Hinduism would posit an individual essence that is continuous from lifetime to lifetime, Buddhism does not teach that such a continuous essence exists. According to Buddha, no self exists that is continuous throughout the samsara cycle. Instead, each individual consists of a combination of five “aggregates,” called skandhas, which include the physical body, emotions, perception, volition, and consciousness. Death causes these aggregates, or parts, to be dismantled, and, much like a car, it ceases to be a cohesive unit when it is taken apart piece by piece. (Dean Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, p. 59)

In the first place, our mental continuum is the basis of our self-identity as a person. It is on the basis of this continuum that—on the ordinary level—we commit contaminated actions, which propel us round and round the vicious cycle of death and rebirth. On the spiritual path, it is also on the basis of this continuity of consciousness that we are able to make mental improvements and experience high realizations of the path. Finally, it is also on the basis of this same continuity of consciousness—which is often identified with our buddha-nature—that we are able to achieve the ultimate state of omniscience. In other words, samsara—our conditioned existence in the perpetual cycle of habitual tendencies—and nirvana—genuine freedom from such an existence—are nothing but different manifestations of this basic continuum. So, this continuity of consciousness is always present. This is the meaning of tantra, or continuity. (Dalai Lama, *The World of Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 29-30)

Continuity & Reincarnation

The Buddha added the notion that all creatures, including man, are fictions: there is really no “self,” only a series of occurrences that appear to be individual persons and things. Once the so-called person is broken down into his component parts and his different actions and attitudes analyzed during the course of time, it is seen that there is really nothing holding it all together. (The question of how there can be reincarnation and striving for salvation without a self has occupied Buddhist philosophy from the start.) The notion of no self is difficult, and much effort is spent trying to grasp it fully. (Steven Cory, *The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error 2: World Religions*)

The philosophy of the non-self does not deny the existence of the I. The theory of non-self was developed primarily to address non-Buddhist philosophies. Their concept is that besides this body and mind, some kind of owner of this body and mind can be identified. That is called “atma.” That atma is said to be permanent. They also use this reason to support the assertion that, if there was no such atma besides the body and mind, there would be no possibility of accepting the concept of rebirth. That is their concept. Their difficulty in upholding this view is based on the problem they have in accepting a mere I. (Dalai Lama, *Buddha Nature*, p. 84)

•

Because the non-Buddhist concept is that death represents an absolute annihilation of the body-mind, then something else must exist independent of the body-mind: an atman in Hinduism, or an immortal

essence in Christianity. Buddhism does not regard the relative 'death' of the self (body-mind) as an absolute ending, merely a continued change. In the same way that selflessness means "the lack of an absolute self," the concept of continuity means "the lack of an absolute beginning and of an absolute ending." Therefore every continuum, whether of causality or of an individual consciousness, is beginningless and endless. In this sense, they are permanent (uncreated), yet also constantly changing (impermanent). This is another instance where the Middle Way represents a unified non-duality ("self/selflessness" and "impermanence/permanence").

Nirvana = Extinction of Individuality?

The goal in Buddhism is to attain freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth (Samsara). Samadhi, or entering into a deep state of consciousness, is supposedly crucial in this process. Through regular meditative exercises, adherents allegedly can prevent evil thoughts from entering their minds, gain awareness of all the events occurring in their lives, and eventually attain the bliss of enlightenment. Buddhism bases this teaching on the understanding that the universe is temporary and illusory. Enlightenment comes when devotees release themselves from the realm of illusion. This leads to a release from the endless cycles of reincarnation and the extinction of individual consciousness. (Debra Lardie, *Concise Dictionary of the Occult and New Age*, p. 53)

Buddhism teaches that people are a collection of impermanent entities in the process of achieving enlightenment. They define sin (*tanha*) as the desire for that which is temporary. This causes people to remain under the illusion that their individual self exists. Deliverance lies in eliminating all desire for that which is impermanent. Permanence comes when people realize the nonexistence of the self. Buddhism also teaches that people should cultivate their ethical character by following the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path. The result is that people will enter nirvana, where the self is extinguished. (Debra Lardie, *Concise Dictionary of the Occult and New Age*, p. 54)

Many people feel that humans are little more than monkeys and that the human mind is nothing but a series of chemical reactions and electrical impulses in the brain. Such a view reduces us to lumps of matter and dismisses any notion of a higher dimension to human existence. (Lama Yeshe, *Introduction to Tantra*, pp. 41-42)

•

Be aware that the Sanskrit word nirodha means “the ‘cessation’ of suffering,” which is the entire theme of the Four Noble Truths in which nirodha is presented. Nirvana is the state of “the ‘extinction’ of suffering.” Now, a corollary could be posited that the extreme views of an eternal self and of carnal desire are also “extinguished,” but this is not intended to detract from the middle view of individuality or of sentience. Therefore, to continually translate nirvana as “the ‘extinction’ of the self” is a misreading of the meaning of the Sanskrit in the third Noble Truth: dukkha-nirodha-arya-satya, which literally translates as “suffering-cessation-noble-truth.”

Reincarnation

[Buddhism] tells you that you have an infinite series of rebirths. If there is an infinite series of rebirths, infinity—infinity is an unending, uncountable. But if Buddha attained nirvana, then it must be countable. He came to a number. It is a finite series of births. So if you talk of an infinite series of rebirths, but Buddha himself had a finite series of rebirths, in order to attain Buddhahood, you immediately begin to see the contradiction. What you really have to understand is that the human heart is desperately wicked and evil and cannot in its own self solve the problem. (Ravi Zacharias, *What Makes the Christian Message Unique?*)

As we discussed earlier, the fact that consciousness exists is a natural fact. Consciousness exists; that is it. Similarly, the continuum of consciousness is also a natural principle: consciousness maintains its continuity. To this we must add that in Buddhism, there is an understanding that consciousness cannot arise from nowhere or without a cause; and, at the same time, that consciousness cannot be produced from matter. This is not to say that matter cannot affect consciousness. However, the nature of consciousness is sheer luminosity, mere experience; it is the primordial knowing faculty, and therefore it cannot be produced from matter whose nature is different. It follows that since consciousness cannot arise without a cause, and since it cannot arise from a material cause, it must come from a ceaseless continuum. It is on this premise that Buddhism accepts the existence of (beginningless) former lives. (Dalai Lama, *A Simple Path: Basic Buddhist Concepts*, p. 108)

Emptiness

So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11, RSV)

A Christian polemicist here incorrectly interprets the doctrine of emptiness (shunyata) as promoting nihilism, and presents this Bible verse in which the word empty connotes a lack of efficacy. Actually, emptiness is unbound potential, and no causal interaction between phenomena could occur unless they were subject to change, by virtue of their dependent nature. Everything is “fully composite” and that is their emptiness!



If you perceive the existence of all things in terms of their essence, then this perception of things will be without the perception of causes and conditions. Causality (cause and effect), and agent and action, and conditions and arising & ceasing will be rendered impossible. (Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 24:16-17; trans. by Jay L. Garfield, pp. 302-303)

The opponent, in virtue of thinking that to exist is to exist inherently, will be unable to account for dependent arising and hence for anything that must be dependently arisen. (Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 302)

It must be pointed out that the doctrine of emptiness in no way refutes the conventional existence of phenomena: the reality of our conventional world, within the framework of which all functions of reality—such as causation, relation, negation, and so

forth—validly operate, is left unscathed and intact. What is demolished is the reified fiction that has resulted from our habitual tendency to grasp at phenomena as self-existent... In fact, the subtler your negation (of true-existence) becomes, the stronger should be your conviction about the efficacy of the relative world. (Dalai Lama, *The World of Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 34)

You have presented fallacious refutations that are not relevant to emptiness. Your confusion about emptiness does not belong to me. (Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 24:13; trans. Jay L. Garfield, p. 301)

Impermanence vs. Permanence

The God of the Bible is permanent in two ways. First, He is permanent in that He is changeless in His character (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Second, He is permanent in that He is faithful in all that He promises (Lamentations 3:23; Hebrews 13:5). How can we make God's permanence a part of our lives? Consider the following:

Jesus answered... "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On Him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:27-29).

In these verses, Jesus talks about working either "for food that spoils" (impermanence) or "for food that endures to eternal life" (permanence). We can receive the "food that endures" through faith in Jesus Christ. (Dean Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, p. 65)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

The author attempts to refute the doctrine of impermanence by citing God's permanence, although this has nothing to do with the issue of impermanence which characterizes the natural world.

•

If dependent arising is denied, emptiness itself is rejected. This would contradict all the worldly conventions... If there is essence, the whole world will be unarising, unceasing, and static. The entire phenomenal world would be immutable. (Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 24: 36, 38; trans. Jay L. Garfield, p. 72)

When you foist on us all your errors, you are like a man who has mounted his horse, and has forgotten that very horse. (Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* 24:15; trans. Jay L. Garfield, p. 301)

Desire vs. Carnal Desire

How can we end suffering? According to the Buddhist teaching, if we can obliterate desire we will obliterate evil. In fact, the very word nirvana means the negation of the jungle of desire to which our births have condemned us. (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: the Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, p. 122)

One might also ask that if desirelessness is the ultimate nirvana, would it then be safe to say that in that state there is not even the desire to see evil come to an end? (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: the Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, p. 122)

What, then, is this self if it doesn't even exist, except as an illusion? The answer of the Buddha is that he himself lived under the illusion of permanence until through multiple reincarnations he discovered the impermanence of all reality. Then he announced that this would be his last existence, since he had obtained complete desirelessness. (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: the Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, p. 122)

Nirodha ("cessation") is the Third Noble Truth. It teaches that the way out of suffering lies in the ability to disengage oneself completely from the false desires of the temporary self. It admonishes one to give up all mental, emotional, or physical cravings, because those desires are merely the manifestations of a person's delusion that the "self" is a permanent entity. Hence, all desires are the ultimate cause of suffering. (Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, pp. 307-308)

It cannot be said too often that there is nothing wrong with pleasure. It is our grasping, exaggerating, distorting and polluting attitude towards pleasure that must be abandoned. (Lama Yeshe, *Introduction to Tantra*, p. 53)

What the development of true renunciation implies is that we no longer rely on sensory pleasures for our ultimate happiness; we see the futility of expecting deep satisfaction from such limited phenomena. It is important to understand this point clearly. Renunciation is not the same as giving up pleasure or denying ourselves happiness. It means giving up our unreal expectations about ordinary pleasures. These expectations themselves are what turn pleasure into pain. (Lama Yeshe, *Introduction to Tantra*, pp. 52-53)

Detachment & Compassion

The Buddha's teachings on rejection of desire and suppression of emotional attachment is seen perhaps best in the story of a monk named Sangamaji. Like Siddhartha, Sangamaji had left his wife and family to search for truth as a homeless wanderer. While sitting in meditation beneath a tree, his wife approached him and lay their child before him. She asked her husband to nourish her and their child. Sangamaji remained silent until finally the woman took the child and left. (Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 308)

Siddhartha, after observing the incident, reportedly commented, "He [Sangamaji] feels no pleasure when she comes, no sorrow when she goes: a true Brahman released from passion." (Udana 1:8).

So, is this...

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26)

...the "best" example of Christian love? Or, is this merely the best example of selective presentation to instill a biased view in the mind of the reader? The author is falsely interpreting the Buddhist notion of "detachment" as apathy and indifference. Rather, Siddhartha Gautama's search for enlightenment was a heart-felt, compassionate response to the problem of suffering.

•

The following is a scene from the 1993 motion picture *Little Buddha*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, when Prince Siddhartha confronts his father the king after seeing firsthand the sufferings of his people:

Siddhartha: Oh, my father. Why have you hidden the truth from me for so long. Why have you lied to me about the existence of suffering, sickness, poverty, old age, and death?

Suddhodana: If I've lied to you Siddhartha, it has been because I love you.

Siddhartha: Your love has become a prison. How can I live here, as I've lived before, when so many are suffering outside?

Suddhodana: You never wanted to go outside.

Siddhartha: Father.

Suddhodana: Mmm?

Siddhartha: I must find an answer to suffering.

Suddhodana: Even if you betray me, Siddhartha, have you no pity for the wife you leave, and for your own son?

Siddhartha: My child is born?

Suddhodana: Born this very evening. Think of them, Siddhartha. You too are a father. You too have a duty! You cannot leave now.

Siddhartha: My love for Yasodhara and my son, cannot remove the pain I feel. For I know that they too will have to suffer, grow old, and die. Like you, like me... Like us all!

Suddhodana: Yes, we must all die. And be reborn, and die again , and be reborn, and die, and be reborn and die again. No man can ever escape that curse.

Siddhartha: Then that is my task: I will lift that curse!

The bodhisattva loves all living beings as if each were his only child. (*Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra*; trans. by Robert A. F. Thurman)

Morality (Part 1)

Buddhism also claims that it is designed to do away with suffering. This would be more convincing if Buddhists were active in social work, but actually they have done almost nothing in this field. The Buddhist thinks that escape from suffering is one's own personal row to hoe. He wouldn't dream of interfering with someone else's problems. The Buddhist has a fatalistic view of life—suffering is part of life. It cannot be removed. Each person must find his own way of escape and not worry about other people. Contrast this with the Christian view. Five hundred twenty years after the death of Buddha, Jesus appeared to bring full and abundant life, not only in the world to come, but in this world. Buddha claimed to have found a way, but Jesus claimed that He is the way. (Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, p. 88)

If Buddhism is fatalistic, then it would not be teaching the end of suffering. Although much of the suffering we conceive of is on the outside, the Buddha emphasized that dukkha comes from the inside. Therefore, his goal was to end suffering once and for all, from the inside out. Yet at the same time, Buddhists do not ignore externals: individual Buddhists give of themselves in many fields, even to existing non-Buddhist charitable organizations. After all, generosity is the first of the Six Perfections, the Buddhist equivalent of the Fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). We are also reminded that we cannot know the best way to help fellow sentient beings if we too are still under the veil of delusion, the blind leading the blind. This is why meditation is actually one of the most virtuous activities one can ever undertake.



He is a true monk who has trained his hands, feet, and speech to serve others. He meditates deeply, is at peace with himself, and lives in joy. (Buddha, *Dhammapada* 362; trans. by Eknath Easwaran)

Mental pollutants, or afflictive thoughts and emotions, refer to a whole class of thoughts and emotions that are afflictive by nature. The etymology of the Tibetan word *nyon-mong* suggests something that afflicts us from within, “affliction” meaning that it causes suffering and pain. The point here is that at the root of all our sufferings, at the subtlest level, lie the afflictions of mind—negative impulses, negative thoughts and emotions, and so forth. This suggests that the root of suffering lies within us, and the root of happiness also lies within us. The key insight we draw from this is that the degree to which we are able to discipline our mind is what determines whether we are happy or whether we suffer. A disciplined state of mind, a spiritually transformed state of mind, leads to happiness, whereas an undisciplined state of mind that is under the power of the afflictions, leads to suffering. (Dalai Lama, *Transforming the Mind*, pp. 23-24)

Buddhism also invokes the doctrine of karma and reincarnation. The opening lines of the Buddhist scriptures say that every individual is the sum total of what he or she thought in his or her past life. One of the collections of Buddha's discourses is called the Anguttara Nikaya. Here are some thoughts:

My kamma [past and present actions] is my only property; kamma is my only heritage; kamma is the only cause of my being, kamma is my only kin, my only protection. Whatever actions I do, good or bad, I shall become their heir.

So, for Buddhism, too, the answer to the disciples' question regarding the blind man's predicament—"Who sinned, this man or his parents?"—would be, "Both this man and his parents have sinned." The suffering of the blind man is the inheritance of his past life's sin, and it is the lot of the parents to inherit the situation. (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: the Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, p. 121)

[W]hat is the definition of karma? We should remember to situate karma within the context of the wider Buddhist understanding of the natural laws of causality. Karma is one particular instance of the natural causal laws that operate throughout the universe where, according to Buddhism, things and events come into being purely as a result of the combination of causes and conditions. Karma, then, is an instance of the general law of causality. What makes karma unique is that it involves intentional action, and therefore an agent. The natural causal processes operating in the world cannot be termed karmic where there is no agent involved. In order for a causal process to be a karmic one, it must involve

an individual whose intention would lead to a particular action. It is this specific type of causal mechanism which is known as karma. (Dalai Lama, *A Simple Path: Basic Buddhist Teachings*, pp. 88-89)



One well-known Buddhist text, the *Milindapañha*, gives an account of a serious discussion that took place between the Greek king Milinda and a scholarly Buddhist priest called Nagasena, about whether or not the Buddha himself is subject to the consequences of his own karma, as when he was injured by an enemy who attacked him:

“For Devadatta, O King, had harbored hatred against the Tathagata during a succession of hundreds of thousands of births. It was in his hatred that he seized hold of a mighty mass of rock, and pushed it over with the hope that it would fall upon his head. But two other rocks came together and intercepted it before it had reached the Tathagata; and by the force of their impact a splinter was torn off, and fell upon the Blessed One’s foot, and made it bleed. Now this pain must have been produced in the Blessed One either as the result of his own Karma, or of some one else’s act. For beyond these two there can be no other kind of pain.

“So, O King, it is not that all pain is the result of Karma. And you should accept as a fact that when the Blessed One became a Buddha he had burnt out all evil from within him.”

The Buddha's injury is explained simply as a physical phenomenon, without any connection to the notion of karma. (Soho Machida, *Buddhists Talk about Jesus, Christians Talk about the Buddha*, pp. 61-62; edited by Rita M. Gross and Terry C. Muck)

Morality (Part 2)

One of my chapters is given over to that question when Jesus was asked, 'Why was this man born blind. Did he sin, or his parents?' And Jesus' answer is fascinating. So let me try and put the hatpin into the heart of the question first, because that's where you begin the answer. When a person says there's too much of evil in this world, they're assuming there's such a thing as good. When they say they assume there's such a thing as good, they must assume there's such a thing as a moral law on the base of which to differentiate between good and evil. But when they posit such a thing as a moral law, they must posit the moral lawgiver, but that's whom the skeptic is often trying to disprove and not prove, because if there's no moral lawgiver, there's no moral law. If there's no moral law, there is no good. If there is no good, there is no evil. What becomes of the question? To raise the question actually posits or assumes the existence of God. So the questioner must ever remember that raising the question does not disprove the existence of God, it only necessitates the existence of God, because without God, good and evil do not actually exist. And therefore, the answer of God in the Christian faith is very unique. (Ravi Zacharias, *What Makes the Christian Message Unique?*)

Actually, there are several moral consequences that follow from the doctrines of impermanence, emptiness, and selflessness. And, this does not require a moral Lawgiver. Since there is no inherent self, then no one person is inherently inferior or superior to another. We are all the same—in fact, all sentient beings have equal Buddha-nature. On the basis of this, there is equanimity, loving-kindness, and compassion towards all sentient beings.



According to these methods, the first thing we need is a sense of equanimity, or equilibrium. Just as level ground is the basis on which you build a house, so too is equanimity—an unbiased attitude towards all other beings—the foundation for cultivating bodhicitta. The experience of past meditators is that when you have achieved such equilibrium, you can cultivate bodhicitta quickly and easily. However, because our habit of discriminating sharply between friends, enemies, and strangers is very deeply rooted within us, such even-mindedness is not easy to achieve. With our tremendous desire we become attached to and cling to our dear friends, with aversion and hatred we reject those we do not like, and with indifference we turn a blind eye to the countless people who appear to be neither helpful nor harmful to us. As long as our mind is under the control of such attachment, aversion, and indifference, we will never be able to cultivate the precious bodhicitta in our heart. Equanimity is not an intellectual concept; it is not just another thought or idea to be played around with in your head. Rather, it is a state of mind, a specific quality of consciousness or awareness to be attained through constant familiarity. (Lama Yeshe, *Introduction to Tantra*, pp. 63-64)

[Loving-kindness] is the desire that all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness. The more you long for the happiness of beings, the more you meditate and pray with them in mind, the more you feel no separation between them and yourself. (Khenchen K. Gyaltshen Rinpoche, *The Transformation of Suffering*, p. 109)

If loving-kindness is wishing that beings have happiness and the causes of happiness, then compassion is the desire to free others from suffering and the causes of suffering. Compassion is a mind free from hatred. (Khenchen K. Gyaltshen Rinpoche, *The Transformation of Suffering*, p. 111)

The Relativity of Time

Both the beginning and the ultimate nature of the world are left unexplained by the Buddha—once again, these questions are not helpful to consider. (Steven Cory, *The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error 2: World Religions*)

But above all, Buddhism faces a truly insurmountable problem. If life is cyclical and there is no beginning to the incarnations, why is there an end? How does one have an infinite regress of causes, if there is a final incarnation? Philosopher William Lane Craig reminds us that an infinite regress of causes is like trying to jump out of a bottomless pit. How do you start if you never reach the bottom? On the other hand, one might well ask, if every birth is a rebirth, what kamma was paid for in his first birth? (Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: the Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, p. 122)

Where is the logic in looking for an absolute beginning to a relative dimension? In fact, it is we who impute a beginning or an ending, even though a true 'beginning' and 'ending' of something can never be isolated. Any such temporal label is a conventional marker, but not a thing-in-itself. When does a "day" start, really, if the sun is always shining?!

From an ultimate perspective, there is no definite beginning. And, it is this desire to find a first cause that Buddhists consider an error. (To respond to this with, "Well, how did it all begin, then?" misses the point because one is merely asking for an alternative first cause!) The fact that nothing arises without a precursor precludes the possibility of a first cause. In regards to karma and a "first birth," Buddha taught that

ignorance precedes karma. Also, an infinite regress or ad infinitum is not a logical fallacy. In fact, considering Occam's Razor, an argument which wins out reductio ad absurdum is more valid than one which must introduce exceptions in order to explain away its own internal inconsistencies.



So Nagarjuna here claims that we cannot make sense of the beginning or end of all of cyclic existence—beginnings and ends are beginnings and ends of actual, conventionally designated and delimited processes within cyclic existence... We can say that we and all phenomena are within cyclic existence, but to posit determinate absolute spatiotemporal locations is senseless. (Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, pp. 197-198)

Nirvana = Cosmic Void?

Buddhists consider God as an impersonal and abstract Void, not a personal, transcendent, and immanent being. They claim that Jesus was an enlightened spiritual master, like Buddha. (Debra Lardie, *Concise Dictionary of the Occult and New Age*, pp. 53-54)

One of the fundamental tenets that sets Christianity apart from Buddhism is that God is personal. Buddhists believe that ultimate reality is an impersonal Void or Emptiness (sunyata). What are the implications or benefits of God's being personal? He is able to love us. He can also hear and answer our prayers. And He can empathize with our suffering (Exodus 3:7, Hebrews 4:15). A Void would not be able to do such things. Share how you have found peace and joy knowing that God loves you and that you can take your cares and concerns to Him. (Dean Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, p. 64)

Buddhists do not consider God as an anything except an eternalistic view. In contrast, the author incorrectly interprets the doctrines of emptiness (shunyata) and no-self (anatman) as promoting nihilism. Calling nirvana a "void" is simplistic. The author is attempting to liken nirvana to a spatio-temporal place like the Christian idea of heaven, which is then clouded by the mistaken understanding of selflessness. This is another case where trying to make the Buddha's teachings of the Middle Way fit into a dualistic framework will always be a misrepresentation of his original intention. The concept of nirvana, if you are trying to understand it within a Christian mindset, would be more appropriately likened to the Kingdom of Heaven ("righteousness,

peace, and joy” Romans 14:17) rather than to a personal God or even an impersonal Force.

Creator God

There is no absolute god in Buddhism, although many have interpreted Buddhism as a search for God. The Buddha did not deny the existence of God outright but said that the question of His existence “tends not to edification.” That is, those seeking enlightenment need to concentrate on their own spiritual paths themselves rather than relying on an outside support. Many Buddhists believe the existence of suffering and evil in the world is evidence against belief in God. Mahayanist teaching at least implies that the powers of the universe will see to it that all creatures will eventually find salvation. (Steven Cory, *The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error 2: World Religions*)

The Buddha did deny the existence of a Creator God since this would contradict his teachings on interdependence and impermanence. Nothing has been created; everything arises by virtue of natural causes and conditions. The only logical evidence a Buddhist needs against a belief in God is to define Him as “self-existent and unchanging.” The existence of suffering and evil are evidence of a wrong view of self. The so-called “powers of the universe” do not naturally incline sentient beings towards enlightenment since the deluded minds of unenlightened beings are constantly reinforced by belief in an inherent self. Only meditative insight into the self-nature of all phenomena can stop suffering at its root.

Nirvana & Individuality

Theravada Buddhism: God = Nirvana, an abstract Void.

Mahayana Buddhism: God = Nirvana, an abstract Void, but also undifferentiated Buddha essence.

Christianity: God = A personal God who is self-existent and changeless.

(Dean Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, p. 61)

[The] full realization of Buddhahood—enlightenment—is sometimes described as becoming of “one taste” with the expanse of the *dharmakaya*. To become of “one taste” is to become inseparable with the *dharmakaya* state. However, that is not to say that individual identities do not remain. (Dalai Lama, *The Good Heart: a Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus*, p. 106)

Buddha-nature vs. The Image of God

Jesus was sinless from the very beginning; it did not take a process to make Him sinless (Matthew 27:4; Luke 23:41; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15). (Dean Halverson, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, p. 61)

According to the Buddhist teachings, no matter how confused or deluded we may be at the moment, the underlying and essential nature of our being is clear and pure. In the same way that clouds can temporarily obscure but cannot damage the light-giving power of the sun, so too the temporary afflictions of body and mind—our confusion, anxiety, and the suffering they cause—can temporarily obscure but cannot destroy or even touch the fundamentally clear nature of our consciousness. Dwelling deep within our heart, and within the hearts of all beings without exception, is an inexhaustible source of love and wisdom. And the ultimate purpose of all spiritual practices, whether they are called Buddhist or not, is to uncover and make contact with this essentially pure nature. (Lama Yeshe, *Introduction to Tantra*, p. 14)

So when we talk about gaining the perfect wisdom of a buddha, we should not think that we need to create qualities in ourselves that are not there already, and acquire them from somewhere outside of us. Rather, we should see perfect buddha wisdom as a potential that is being realized. The defilements of the mind hamper the natural expression of that potential which is inherent in our consciousness. It is as if the capacity for unobstructed knowledge is there in our mind, but the defilements obscure and hinder it from being fully developed and expressed. However,

once our understanding of the mind is informed by the idea that the essential nature of the mind is pure luminosity and mere experience, or the sheer capacity to know, we can then conceive of the possibility of eliminating these afflictions completely. (*Dalai Lama, A Simple Path: Basic Buddhist Concepts*, pp. 146-147)

What the Buddha Taught

Then the Buddha gave advice of extreme importance to the group of Brahmins: 'It is not proper for a wise man who maintains (lit. protects) truth to come to the conclusion: "This alone is Truth, and everything else is false".'

Asked by the young Brahmin to explain the idea of maintaining or protecting truth, the Buddha said: 'A man has faith. If he says "This is my faith", so far he maintains truth. But by that he cannot proceed to the absolute conclusion: "This alone is Truth, and everything else if false".' In other words, a man may believe what he likes, and he may say 'I believe this'. So far he respects truth. But because of his belief or faith, he should not say what he believes is alone the Truth, and everything else is false.

The Buddha says: 'To be attached to one thing (to a certain view) and to look down upon other things (views) as inferior—this the wise men call a fetter.'

Once the Buddha explained the doctrine of cause and effect to his disciples, and they said that they saw it and understood it clearly. Then the Buddha said: 'O bhikkhus, even this view, which is so pure and so clear, if you cling to it, if you fondle it, if you treasure it, if you are attached to it, then you do not understand then the teaching is similar to a raft, which is for crossing over, and not for getting hold of'.

(Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, pp. 10-11)

The Discipline of Loving God with Our Minds

Many local Bible teachers and preachers have never been forced to confront alternative interpretations at full strength; and because they would lose a certain psychological security if they permitted their own questions, aroused by their own reading of Scripture, to come into full play, they are unlikely to throw over received traditions. But I am not talking about such people. I am restricting myself for the sake of this discussion to the wisest, most mature, best trained, and most devout leaders of each position: why cannot they move to greater unanimity on all kinds of doctrinal fronts?

Superficially, of course, there may be several purely practical hurdles to overcome. The leaders may not feel they have the time to spend in the kind of quality discussion that would win breakthroughs. Probably most of them think the other person is so set in his or her ways that there is little to be gained by attempting such a dialogue—all the while feeling quite certain that most if not all the movement should come from the opponents, who ought to admit to the errors of their ways and adopt the true position! Others might feel too insecure in their position to venture into debate. But if we could remove all those kinds of hindrances, the most crucial causes of doctrinal division among these hypothetical leaders who have now (in our imagination) gathered for humble, searching discussions in an effort to heal their divisions would be differences of opinion as to what this passage or that passage actually says, or as to how this passage and that passage relate to each other.

It is possible, of course, that frank, extended debate might at first do no more than expose the nature of the differences, or how interwoven they are with broader questions. Ultimately, however, once all those tributaries have been carefully and humbly explored, each raising difficult exegetical questions of its own, the remaining debates among those who hold a high view of Scripture will be exegetical and hermeneutical, nothing else. Even if our theoretical opponents succeed only in getting to the place where they decide the exegetical evidence is insufficient to reach a sure decision, they will have gained something; for that position, honestly held on both sides, would mean that neither party has the right, on biblical grounds, to exclude the other.

From time to time I have been involved in such talks; indeed, occasionally I have sought them out. Sometimes it is impossible to get very far: the emotional hurdles are too high, or the potential time commitment to win unanimity too great. But where immensely profitable conversations have taken place, there has always been on both sides a growing ability to distinguish a good argument from a bad one, a strong argument from a weak one.

It follows, then, that the study of exegetical fallacies is important. Perhaps we shall find extra incentive in this study if we recall how often Paul exhorts the Philippian believers to be like-minded, to think the same thing—an exhortation that goes beyond mere encouragement to be mutually forbearing, but one that demands that we learn to move towards unanimity in the crucial business of thinking God's thoughts after him. This, surely, part of the discipline of loving God with our minds.

Like much of our theology, our exegetical practices in most cases have been passed on to us by teachers who learned them many years earlier. Unless both our teachers and we ourselves have kept up, it is all too likely that our exegetical skills have not been honed by recent developments. Hermeneutics, linguistics, literary studies, greater grammatical sophistication, and advances in computer technology have joined forces to demand that we engage in self-criticism of our exegetical practices. Moreover, some of the developments have so spilled into broader areas of Christian endeavor (e.g., the impact of the new hermeneutic on our understanding of contextualization in world missions) that mature thought is urgently required. The sum total of all useful exegetical knowledge did not reach its apex during the Reformation, nor even in the last century. As much as we can and must learn from our theological forebears, we face the harsh realities of this century; and neither nostalgia nor the preferred position of an ostrich will remove either the threats or the opportunities that summon our exegetical skills to new rigor.

(D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, pp. 15-17)

The Emptiness of Biblical Hermeneutics

Linguistically, meaning is not an intrinsic possession of a word; rather, it is a set of relations for which a verbal symbol is a sign. (D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, p. 31)

...the meaning of a sentence is not the sum of the meanings of the words in it. It could almost be said that considered apart from their context words have no meaning; they receive a meaning only when a sentence, paragraph, chapter or even the entire book or letter is considered as a whole.... Some would even go so far as to say that it has *no* meaning apart from in a context, only a *possibility* of meaning. (Robert Bradshaw, *Language*)

In actual fact, because there is no intrinsic relationship between words/signifiers and meanings/conceptual signifieds, the meaning of a word cannot be derived from an historical investigation of its earliest use.... More technically put—and this is, again, a cornerstone of the modern approach—language and its usage must be studied synchronically (at a cross section in time) not diachronically (developmentally through time). (James Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, p. 93)

When we use signifiers in discourse, we apply them as labels, saying that the referent—i.e., what we are talking about—has characteristics which are congruent with the characteristics of the conceptual signifieds which these signifiers evoke in the mental world. Otherwise expressed, when we communicate, we talk/write about persons, places, things, ideas, etc. (= referents), and we characterize them in certain ways; that is, we ascribe to them the features of the thoughts (= conceptual signifieds) which

they brought to our mind and which now, in turn, the words (= signifiers) of our communication are to bring to the minds of those who receive them. (James Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, pp. 93, 94)

(A) The meaning of the larger whole is *more than* the sum of the meanings conveyed by the individual signifiers.... (B) The meaning of individual signifiers arises only in relation to the meanings of other signifiers and in view of the relationship of these meanings one to another. (James Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, pp. 100, 102)

Therefore, the meanings of the larger whole is the meaning of a matrix of signifiers with interrelated meanings, with the meanings of all signifiers being understood in every respect in relation to the meanings of all other signifiers. In other words, nothing (no word/signifier) has individual meaning apart from context, including the larger context (point (B) immediately above); all individual meanings and groups of meanings (point (A) above); and the entire package itself conveys a total meaning. Indeed, it is also only with this total approach that the referents of the individual signifiers involved can also be determined. NB: *It is impossible to overstate the importance of this major point.* (James Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, pp. 102-103; emphasis in original)

What is here espoused is one of the foundation tenets of structuralism, an approach to language (cf. Voelz, 240) which holds, among other things, that that which is signified must be distinguished from the signifier; signifiers are arbitrary and contain no natural link to that which they signify; totalities are

explained in terms of the relationship among the parts; parts have meaning only within the context of the whole; synchronic not diachronic analysis is key. (James Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, p. 103, n. 35)

It may, finally, be noted that metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are the basic means by which languages expand their meaning base. (James Voelz, *What Does this Mean?*, p. 172)

Words are arbitrary and conventional symbols used to signify meaning. A word does not get its meaning from its sound or form, but from the conventional meaning attributed to it by a particular socio-linguistic group. The English word “gift” commonly means “something bestowed voluntarily and without compensation.” But the same word in German (das Gift) means “poison” (a very different kind of “gift”!). There is nothing inherent in the form of the word which determines its meaning. Words are conventional symbols which point to conceptual meaning. (Mark Strauss, *Form, Function, and the “Literal Meaning” Fallacy in English Bible Translation*, p. 6; originally appearing in *The Bible Translator*, vol. 56.3, pp. 153-168)

Since words are symbols representing ideas or concepts, we must go a step further and define the translation process more comprehensively. By definition, the transfer of meaning is an act of communication. For a translation to be successful, meaning must be transferred from *one person to another*. Meaning ultimately resides not in words or sentences, but in persons. Evangelical hermeneutics has historically associated the meaning of a text with the author’s intention. The meaning of Paul’s letter to the Galatians is discerned by exegeting the text to determine what

Paul meant. Those conversant with contemporary hermeneutical discussion will recognize that this is an oversimplification, and that meaning must be seen as a dynamic interplay between author, text and reader. While such nuancing is necessary, evangelicals steadfastly assert (a) that there is a meaning in the text, and (b) that this meaning has as its locus *the intentional speech-act of the historical author*. For translation to be successful, the intention—not just the words—of the author must be successfully transferred from one person to another. (Mark Strauss, *Form, Function, and the “Literal Meaning” Fallacy in English Bible Translation*, pp. 7-8; originally appearing in *The Bible Translator*, vol. 56.3, pp. 153-168)

A monk decides to meditate alone, away from his monastery. He takes his boat out to the middle of the lake, moors it there, closes his eyes and begins his meditation. After a few hours of undisturbed silence, he suddenly feels the bump of another boat colliding with his own. With his eyes still closed, he senses his anger rising, and by the time he opens his eyes, he is ready to scream at the boatman who dared disturb his meditation. But when he opens his eyes, he sees it's an empty boat that had probably got untethered and floated to the middle of the lake. At that moment, the monk achieves self-realization, and understands that the anger is within him; it merely needs the bump of an external object to provoke it out of him. From then on, whenever he comes across someone who irritates him or provokes him to anger, he reminds himself, "The other person is merely an empty boat. The anger is within me."

— Lama Karma Yeshe Rabgye
Are You Living the Moment? (p. 9)