

The Four Distinguishing Feature of Buddhist Belief

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Buddhism, as a worldly religion, the origination and development of it not only reflected the psychological and sentimental needs of spiritual world within human beings, but also indicated the demand of morality and the pursue of the goodness in human's social life. Of all the religions in the world, Buddhism lay stress on its characteristic of wisdom. Dr. Sun, Zhong Shan once said, "Buddhism is the mother of philosophy, the benevolence of saving the world; study Buddhism can mend the prejudiced view of science." Liang, Qi Chao said, "Buddhist belief is the right faith but not blind faith. It's to benefit all but not sole self. It's abided in the world but not world-weary. It's immeasurable but not limited. It's equality but not disparity. It's relying on self rather than others." Mr. Liang, Qi Chao's highly condensed words can be used as our guidance to grasp the characteristics of Buddhism belief.

Whether it's personal cultivation and improvement or social prosperity and growth, it all requires "the right belief". Then, Buddhism belief is "the right belief" with its own value and meaning. The distinguishing features of Buddhism belief are as follows:

First · Unity of passion and reason

Buddhism, the revelation from the ocean of great compassion and wisdom of the most honorable enlightened one, is one kind of verbal directions which are full of wisdom, mercy, radiance and refreshness. What is the right-faith Buddhism are the correct faith, the right vow, the right understanding, the honest practice, the true reliance. A religion with the right faith must be inevitable such, naturally such, universal such. If a religion cannot past the trial of these three conditions, that's blind belief not the right belief.

"Belief" is the first entrance of getting into Buddhism and is treated as the most important starting place. Flower adornment Sutra described, "Belief is the origin of doctrine and the mother of morality; nourishes every good dharma; eradicate the doubt net and be out of the river of desire; demonstrate the supreme way toward nirvana." The fascicle one of Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra (Dazhi du lun) also mentioned, "The ocean of Buddha Dharma, only the one who believes in can get in." The metaphor in the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra said that, just like a man who goes to the mountain of treasury, there are lots of treasuries in there. However, Belief is like the two hands. One with belief can harvest in the precious mountain of treasury with wisdom. Therefore, to

acquire the benefit of Buddhism, one has to have the belief.

In Buddhism, “faith” means worshipping and believing with unified body and mind, consistent inside and out. Faith, as a pursuit, is an activity in spiritual and sentimental world. It’s hard to compare with tangible, valuable substance. Some people often feel that they lose control and cannot establish the central goal. That’s because he himself has no faith. One without faith cannot integrate his ideology and generate strength. Belief is like our home. Home makes our life have something to rely on.

Meanwhile, each belief has some object to believe in. As the right belief in Buddhism, it accentuates on truth, meritorious virtues, function etc. Buddhist belief puts emphasis on believing in that Shakyamuni Buddha is truly existed. At the same time, Shakyamuni Buddha, with the perfection of all the merit and conduct, is the Awakened one. He is endowed with the three virtues, which are the potency of his perfect knowledge, elimination of afflictions and perfecting of supreme nirvana, and his universal grace and salvation. His morality is wholly completely pure. Follow the footstep of this teacher of men and gods can uplift our moral quality and consummate our character.

The object we believe in has to possess satisfactory true reality. Buddhist principle, without partiality, is therefore called true principle. Buddhist truth is true for the whole world and applies to any time, space, mankind and matter. Because Buddha dharma goes beyond space-time and has no limitation, thus, it’s satisfactory.

As a result, though faith in Buddhism puts stress on the passion of belief, it thinks highly of the reason of it. Through the investigation and differentiation, faith in Buddhism understand the object of belief possess natures of authentication, meritorious virtue and function. Buddhism belief laid its foundation on intellect. Start off on intellect and proceed to reinforce the faith. The belief was understood and cultivated by wisdom. The deeper the understanding is the stronger the faith. This faith can initiate our force to the perfection and good conduct. Not only have the sincerity of admiration on the object of belief but further also want to reach the same condition.

Mr. Liang, Shu Ming once said, “The characteristics of western culture are religious, faith-based; that of Chinese Culture is ethical, rational.” In reality, in Buddhism culture, religion is philosophical, and philosophy is religious. Therefore, Buddha Dharma as a faith manifests itself as the unity of passion and reason. According to Buddhist doctrine, faith focuses more on feeling. However, the object to believe in is anticipated to be whatever intellect can reach. Rational thinking is not just about abstract vague and

general knowledge. Whatever realized must have true content that is worthy of respect and admiration.

Buddhist life contains the factor of belief. When we look at those Buddha's clay sculpture, holding those teaching left by Buddha, an inherent sacred sense arise within us. One can wash away inner afflictions of greed, anger, self-pride with faith. Faith is just like alums. Put it into the muddy water, and the muddy water has to be clear. There is a lot of suffering in real life. Faith can transform our hollow and depressed mood to attain joy, settlement and enrichment. But, without free thinking, intellectual cultivation, the faith will always be following other people's footstep. This is self-complacency. It's a blind and anti-intellect superstition. Buddhist belief undergoes the process of observation through wisdom. It doesn't abolish reason in the belief and therefore has no drawbacks of which ordinary religion only emphasizes on faith but not on understanding.

External things are impermanent. Hence, the inquiry of Buddhism wisdom is self-experience centered. The truth cannot attain from external world. After recognizing and grasping the self, from inner to outer and then extend to the phenomenon world in life. Utilize the outside world as a confirmation of self-experience. The more advanced and correct view and understanding toward Buddhism, the firmer the belief is. The belief without rational thinking seems devoted but in reality superficial. Thus, Buddhism advocates that belief arises from deep understanding and assures that belief through knowledge is profound and rigid. Buddhist dharma is the unity of passion and reason. There is profound and thorough reason in the passionate worship. Behind the cold reason, there is sentimental impulsion. When understand experience and practice in such way, can the future in life be full of infinite light.

Second · Faith implements the study and cultivation of Buddhism enlightenment from beginning to the end

What is belief? In the volume six of "Discourse on the Theory of Consciousness-only" described as followed, "What's belief? Truth, virtue, proficiency, outstanding comprehension, desire, pure mind are the essence. Overcome the disbelief and loving to do philanthropic work is the effect." "Pure mind is the essence." means that inner purity with no subjectivity and personal prejudice but only a pure flawless state of mind. With such pure mind, one can accept the enlightened one, truth, and the people practicing the truth with an open mind until reaching enlightenment. "Deep endurance" is incisive forbearance, i.e. "outstanding comprehension". This profound and powerful comprehension can initiate the confidence, and therefore it was said that "outstanding comprehension is the cause of faith." "Desire" is the hope and desire to realize the goal.

If there is faith, then there must be desire. Thus said, “Desire is the effect of faith.” Faith can only reveal itself out of profound understanding and sincere desire. Moreover, it is triggered by the reason but can spur desire. The essence of faith is pure mind. This is cordial and chaste favorable impression and admiration. This is the power to move the heart to the stable and clear state. Just like mani-jewel can clarify muddy water. Having faith and mind is pure and stable with no doubt and has reverent sincerity to the three jewels. Because seeing truthfully and believing earnestly, one must request himself to realize Buddhist doctrine by practicing.

As for entering the gate of Buddhism learning, some people are from faith, some people are from compassion, and some from wisdom. But, faith is the first entrance of learning Buddhism. The vehicles of sravaka said, “Belief can let in, precept can let cross over.” The vehicles of Bodhisattva said, “Belief can let in, wisdom can let cross over.” Precept and wisdom might as well have the imbalance but “Belief can let in” is common and absolutely necessary. When Shakyamuni Buddha first reached enlightenment, he thought of the difficulty of preaching and felt that only when one is prepared with faith, one can accept and practice the teaching. Nagarjuna set a metaphor as such, “Just like one went into the mountain of treasury, he would gain nothing without his hands. Seeing and hearing Buddha dharma, one would gain nothing in the end without confidence (faith).” Therefore one can tell that the boundless merit of Buddha dharma comes from the root of faith. Thus said, “Faith is the source of truth, the mother of virtues.”

The order of the entire Buddhism practice is centered on believing and understanding the teachings, practicing of religious discipline and the resulting enlightenment. Most people think that belief is just the first entrance of Buddhism practice. However, these four stages are interfused and well versed in. It's a process of continuous distillation, improvement and advance. If penetrating the entire Buddhist doctrine by “faith”, it can be divided into “to believe and obey”, “to believe and endure”, “to believe and seek” and “awakening belief”. All of above are called “faith”, which is based on mind's purity.

“To believe and obey” shows sympathy and favorable impression to the three jewels and has selfless pure mind and understand the reason. Only when truly “believe and obey” Buddhist doctrine, one can accept and approve Buddha Dharma and enter into the gate of Buddha Dharma. To believe and obey, first requirement is having no doubt on Buddhist doctrine and be able to confirm the authenticity and absoluteness. This is a general character in all religious belief. Based on this and go one step further to seek profound understanding and attain explicit right view. This is labeled as “believe and endure” or “believe and confirm”. Buddhist belief is absolutely not a solely passionate

belief. It encourages people to think and choose Buddha dharma and accomplish the associated wisdom. Only through such wisdom, the genuine and sincere belief can arise. Undergoing “believe and obey” and “believe and confirm”, faith is then truly accomplished. This is the stage of believing and understanding.

The belief is not just one kind of sentimental and rational approval. It requires heartfelt experience and initiates the pursuit of realizing this goal. The practice of belief needs its own experience and inspiration. If the votary doesn't experience the benefit of having a belief, it's hard to strengthen one's faith. So does Buddhist belief. Hence, in Buddhist sutras and patriarchs' work and even in the propagation of modern Buddhism, inspiration and experience are essential. In the practicing process, faith constantly increases. This is the stage of apprehending and following the teaching.

“Awakening belief” or some called “awakening purity”. This is after practicing oneself and proves what one believes in is not false. This is “attaining enlightenment doesn't count on others.” And “Don't rely on words”. This is “the stage of realization”. Therefore, faith is not only just embraced of something, but further asks us to practice and verify our faith. By only doing that, one can reach that state of “non-retrogression of faith”. For example, the enlightenment in Zen practitioner; the four objects of unfailing faith in Theravada, i.e. the four assuring purities such as Buddha assuring purity, Dharma assuring purity, Sangha assuring purity, Holy Precepts assuring purity are pure faith. In Mahayana, the arising of the mind of intention to achieve enlightenment is the achievement of Mahayana faith. Realizing the Dharma in Mahayana Buddhism completely is called “The pure heart stage”. Consequently, *The Awakening of Mahayana Faith* stresses on believing in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and Suchness. Attain suchness by study and cultivation of Mahayana Buddhism and finally fulfill the Mahayana faith as the principle aim. If have no faith in the dharma of Mahayana Buddhism, then one has no connection with Mahayana.

Third · Belief is a kind of inner realization

Buddhist belief emphasizes on inner realization of the truth and the character of independence. Therefore, “faith” cannot be deluded by external human affairs and forgot about self nature. Hence, Buddha said, “Self-reliance, Dharma-reliance, no reliance on others.” Buddhism promotes each person's character to the highest point. What's called “Everyone has Buddha nature.” If one has this kind of realization, one's faith must build up.

According to Buddha, everything associated with the sentient being is determined by

one's own thinking and action. The ultimate way of entrusting one's life to Buddhism is that the thinking and behavior of the sentient being should be in conformity with the principle. Purify and complete themselves by conforming to the law of causes and effects in everything. So, taking refuge to Dharma is to rely on the truth of the reason of cause and effect. Take refuge to Buddha and Sangha. Buddha and Sangha are the enlighten one who agree with the truth, i.e. Dharma, and complete oneself. Taking refuge means to respect and admire the awakening one but not depend on external Gods. Buddha Dharma is self-reliance and accomplishes the completion of life through one's own belief, wisdom and action. The difference between Buddha Dharma and other religion is that it negates external deity and value the self purification. This is the inner realization of Buddhist belief.

Belief and practice in Buddha Dharma is the way of practice to limit body and mind and to realize the inner pureness and comfort. What to believe in and what to learn about are not deities' worshipping beyond one's body and mind, but to confirm that one's body and mind can reach the complete satisfaction by practicing. The Dharma teaching in Mahayana Buddhism, a dharma gate of practicing to become a Buddha, is based on one's mind to believe and practice. It is also based on one's mind as the fundamental standpoint to comprehend everything. Therefore, "*The Awakening of Mahayana Faith*" points out, Mahayana is the mind of all the living. The awakening of Mahayana faith is to believe in the dharma gate which is based on the mind of all the living.

Hence, the profound meaning of taking refuge is to turn towards oneself, self-mind, and self-nature. One has Buddha nature. One can become a Buddha. The essence of self's body and mind is the true dharma and nirvana. One practices by the principle and is unified with Sangha. This is what's called "the three jewels of self nature". Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, the three jewels, are not separated from one's body. These are all what one's body and mind can accomplish and manifest. Therefore, we, the Buddhist followers, take refuge to the three jewels, and held the ceremony of proclaiming to be a Buddhist. On the surface, taking refuge is to rely on the acceptance of other-power. In reality, looking in further, this is just cause beyond direct empowerment. It actually stimulates our body and mind and wishes to realize "three jewels of self nature" within ourselves.

Fourth · Buddhism belief possess the nature of tolerance and interfusion

Belief is exclusive sentimentally. This is inevitably true. Buddhism belief is no exception. However, if this exclusiveness gets inflated infinitely, it will turn out to be original doctrine or to repel heresy. As a result, a religious belief has to insist on its own religious independence and simultaneously have the tolerance and interfusion. This kind

of religion can truly bring the peace and benefit to the society and mankind. Buddhism can get this accomplished.

From Buddhist's viewpoints, Buddhism is great, supreme and unsurpassed. Taking refuge is turning evil to goodness and turning delusion to enlightenment. Hence, from Buddhism's standpoint, the theory of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism homology is just a doctrine of expedient means for easy preaching. It's not the ultimate doctrine. If we continue to invite people from other religion to preach doctrine to the general Buddhists, though it seems to help understanding other religion and promote inter-religion peace. Yet, after all, it violates the purity and supremeness of Buddhism belief. In spite of this, Buddhism is a peaceful and intelligent religion. In Buddhism history, there has never been once that a war started because of missionary work. Buddhist followers with their unique tolerance make their won contribution to human civilization. That's especially true for Chinese Buddhism. Chinese Buddhism utilizes its own peculiar power of integration, and guidance, treat "teaching classification" as expedient means to absorb other religion and culture into its own system of faith.

Nonetheless, Buddhism belief is most conforming to reason. A Buddhist follower who has certain understanding on Buddha Dharma can accept ordeal and do not shake his faith. Besides, Buddhism is not a religion with dictatorial belief. It doesn't negate the value of other religion. Buddhism segregated Buddha's teaching to five vehicles. The vehicles of rebirth among men and devas are the foundation of the five vehicles and the common dharma-gate of all Buddhist teaching. It is also the universal goodness of all religion and philosophy. As a result, a right-faith Buddhist is confident that the value of Buddhism exceeds that of other religion, but will not discriminate and revolt against other religion. This is where Buddhism is especially excellent about.

Since Buddhism belief is the unity of passion and reason, Buddhist follower reveal proper rites and wisdom in their faith life. Some people often think that believing in Buddhism doesn't require any external rites, doesn't need to attend any Buddhism dharma gathering or activities. They consider this kind of belief is preliminary. In reality, it is not. Ceremony is important embodiment of a Buddhist's faith life. It's significant measure which Buddhist followers express their religious emotion. In the process of practicing Buddhism rites, the influencing power of affair and perception can let Buddhists understand the wisdom and philosophy of Buddhism and cultivate Buddhist practitioner's mind. This helps the propagation and reinforcement of Buddhism belief. At the same time, Buddhism etiquette is major channel for the sangha to connect with followers and deepen the emotion between Buddhist followers. This is the source of enhancing Buddhist believer's cohesion. In the course of participating in Buddhism

activities, the Buddhist votary ceaselessly strengthens the sympathy with Buddhism and as a Buddhist. Here forms a strong feeling in the inner world, I am a Buddhist. This is very sacred and meaningful. Furthermore, with the public's support, it's easier to restrain one's own body and mind and improve one's faith in a group life.

On the other hand, all Buddhism rites are used as an expedient means and basis to attain the enlightenment of the truth. Many ceremonies are of dharma-expression significance, such as burning incense and offering flower etc. It's exactly by going through these rites; we understand the inner life of Buddha Dharma and the truth of the universe. This reflects the Buddhist characteristic of perfection and interfusion of principle and phenomena.

In conclusion, Buddhism belief as a religion belief possesses the same aspect as other religions, but demonstrates prominently its uncommon and especially excellent aspect.