

Buddhism: Religion or Philosophy?

البوذية: دين أم فلسفة؟

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Abstract:

Buddhism is a spiritual tradition originating in ancient India, founded by the Buddha — a wise figure who renounced royal life to seek answers to human suffering. Through meditation, spiritual practices, and the guidance of teachers, he pursued enlightenment, never claiming divine power but attributing his achievements to personal effort and wisdom. His teachings, initially transmitted orally before being written down, aim to guide all beings toward the end of suffering and rebirth. Buddhism is often seen as a philosophy rather than a religion, given its focus on meditation and mindfulness. It is grounded in the Four Noble Truths, which lead toward Nirvana — a state of liberation, peace, and freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Keywords: Buddhism- Buddha- enlightenment- religion- philosophy- history- civilization

Throughout Asian civilizations, and particularly in ancient times, men distinguished themselves by developing numerous fields of knowledge, striving to establish frameworks of thought through which they sought to elucidate the nature of the world and provide an emotional interpretation of the universe's manifestations. Buddhism stands as one such discipline, examining the fundamental principles governing beings and things, as well as humanity's place within the cosmos. This profound way of life is rooted in the accounts of Buddha's life and his teachings. Today, Buddhism has evolved into a comprehensive system that offers its followers an autonomous approach to navigating existence, furnishing them

with meaningful answers regarding their role in the world, as well as insights into the realities of other realms.

In this article, we examine this subject more closely, endeavouring to elucidate whether Buddhism constitutes a humanist philosophy or a religion in the strict sense of the term. How does it distinguish itself from other doctrines that have emerged in Asia, such as Hinduism or Confucianism? And what is the approach employed to guide a practising Buddhist towards the knowledge of the ultimate truth, or more precisely, towards enlightenment?

The historical existence of the Buddha is no longer seriously questioned. He never claimed to be of divine origin, to have been sent by the gods, or to have received any divine revelation. Nor did he claim to have come to establish a new religion or tradition for the Indian people. From the moment of his awakening and throughout his life, he taught a path of liberation applicable to all beings — a way of living. In this respect, he bears a closer resemblance to Socrates than to the prophets of monotheistic religions. Nevertheless, Buddhism rapidly evolved into a fully-fledged religion, complete with its canonical texts — which record the words and deeds of the man and were compiled to preserve his memory — its monastic assemblies, its councils, its competing schools, and its doctrinal debates. The vast majority of practitioners experience Buddhism as a religion in its own right.

Throughout its history, and across the many eras and transformative events that have shaped the course of time, Buddhism has demonstrated a remarkable flexibility, an openness, a profound understanding, and an exceptional capacity for adaptation — a spiritual choreography of rare elegance, seldom encountered in any other tradition.

"The historical biography of Buddhism's founder does not constitute the central pillar of this Eastern spiritual tradition, nor is it characterized by great precision. The Buddha's true and fundamental contribution rests upon lived experience. Siddhartha Gautama, the future Buddha, was born in the 6th century B.C. into a wealthy and respected family in northern India. The son of a valiant Sakya chieftain and a gracious, devout queen, legend holds that Siddhartha came into the world beneath a sacred tree in spring, during the full moon of the Indian month of Vaishakha (corresponding to May or June in our calendar). His

father, Suddhodana, received the news with great joy, promptly summoning astrologers and a wise man to foretell the child's destiny. An aged Himalayan hermit prophesied an extraordinary fate for the infant... Tragically, seven days after the prince's birth, his mother passed away. Siddhartha was subsequently raised by his maternal aunt, who had become his father's second wife" (TOULA-BREYSSE, 1999, pp14-15).

In his early years, the young child led a princely existence and was trained in a wide range of skills and disciplines, encompassing martial arts and religious philosophy. Spiritual formation, refinement in interpersonal conduct and moral integrity were among the most fundamental pillars upon which royal children were raised at that time. Consequently, the cultivation of ethical values was considered of paramount importance. Following the birth of the child Buddha, he benefited from this form of primary education, which subsequently prepared him to receive advanced instruction from learned monks. The term Buddha is an honorific title bestowed upon a man of great wisdom :

"Buddha" translates as "the Enlightened One", a title bestowed upon him by his followers to designate the man widely regarded as the founder of Buddhism, who both discovered and disseminated its teachings (6th–5th century BC) (CRAPOULET, 2009, p56).

The term Buddha denotes the root of knowledge, the wellspring of intelligence, and the origin of the mind. Buddha evokes the notion of one who has awakened — one who has, on the one hand, transcended all imperfections and, on the other, fully cultivated the highest qualities. Such a being has awakened to the true nature of reality and has, moreover, penetrated its deepest essence. Historians and scholars of Indian thought continue to debate the historical reality of the Buddha's persona. His existence is attested by the emergence of a movement, a philosophy, and a way of life that bear his unmistakable imprint. He appears to have been a remarkable individual who left an enduring legacy, giving rise to a tradition that has profoundly shaped countless generations. Numerous accounts and testimonies bear witness to this extraordinary figure and the life he led.

Buddha lived in the 6th century B.C., a period that allows us to place him within a broader philosophical landscape. He was a contemporary of the great Greek philosophers, as well as of Confucius in China, Mozi, and Lao-Tzu. These were individuals who had attained a

profound state of inner freedom, finding purpose in their existence through rigorous self-cultivation. This represents a mystical and spiritual quest in search of a path that liberates the mind from illusion. Throughout his life, Buddha endeavored to transcend the suffering inherent in aging, illness, and the fear of death. He thus devoted himself to the pursuit of a spiritual path leading to happiness, which constitutes the very foundation of Buddhism. The search for inner truth demands a form of radical departure from one's former life, which is why Buddha chose to leave his family behind. In Asia, the faithful are not necessarily bound to restrict themselves to a single religious tradition.

The Buddha's teaching, essentially both an experience and a methodology, pursues a fundamental objective : the eradication of suffering, thereby giving rise to serenity and happiness. Suffering pervades the world, and it is through spiritual seeking that one must endeavour to transcend it. Buddha is not a deity, but rather a human being who attained a profound understanding of mankind's true nature and the path to enlightenment. Buddhists regard him as a guide who, drawing upon his own experience, reason and intuition, arrived at a groundbreaking discovery that others may follow. He deliberately chose spiritual liberation over temporal power. Religion encompasses the notion of dogma, with faith representing adherence to its principles. Dogmatic theology draws from a single source : divine revelation, as is the case in monotheistic traditions. Buddhism, however, neither follows dogma nor acknowledges the existence of a creative deity. Instead, it offers philosophical and moral precepts to which its followers adhere and through which they seek to transform themselves. At this point, it is worth examining the principles of Buddhist thought associated with the concept of Dharma : "In its broadest sense, dharma refers to the Buddha's teaching ; it designates the objects of knowledge. The term is primarily employed in two distinct ways : to denote the teaching itself, the words of the Buddha, and the path of knowledge leading to liberation from samsara (conditioned existence); and to refer to any object of knowledge, encompassing the totality of phenomena. Compound objects of knowledge pertain to samsara, whereas non-compound objects belong to nirvana. It stands as a fundamental concept within Buddhism" (CRAPOULET, 2009, p56).

The concept of Dharma has been employed by Buddhists within a cultural framework that predates and transcends "Buddhism" itself. It denotes the foundation and the underlying order upon which all existence rests. It constitutes the governing law that shapes the existence and the unfolding of all things. Being in the world can therefore only manifest itself through the dynamics of a set of intertwined correlations and relationships. Dharma thus embodies the teaching of one who has attained enlightenment and serves as a source of inspiration. The concept evokes the law of causality : every effect engenders a cause, and every cause arises from an effect.

Before discovering the middle way, he came to understand that awakening and realization are not attained through restraint, but through the acceptance of natural laws. The Four Noble Truths, which constitute the very foundations of Buddhism, revolve around the notion of suffering and, in a broader sense, of existential dissatisfaction. The truth of Buddhism lies in direct experience : following the enlightened example set by the Buddha, Buddhists are themselves capable of attaining such experience. Once this experience has been reached, its truth becomes self-evident. It is therefore through the empirical dimension of personal experience that one is guided toward the knowledge of truth. The Buddha's doctrine is thus not grounded in metaphysics, but rather in entirely empirical, practical, and concrete observations, which every Buddhist is able to discover within the depths of their own experience.

The four noble truths encompass : the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of its origin, the noble truth of its cessation, and the noble truth of the path that leads to such cessation. "-1 All existence is suffering. -2 The source of suffering lies in desire (the craving to exist). -3 The elimination of desire leads to the cessation of suffering. -4 The path toward the elimination of desire is the eightfold path : right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration" (DUFLOS, n° 46-47, p11).

Profound and intense suffering has an origin — it is caused, it stems from a source, and it has deep roots that give rise to it. The third truth therefore holds that this suffering can cease, that liberation from pain is attainable. The fourth and noble truth affirms

that there exists a path, a journey, a set of practices through which one may transcend this suffering and pain. Buddhism unveils the noble truths that constitute the very foundation of its doctrine : that the world is permeated by suffering, and that through birth, illness, old age and death, anguish is inevitably born. Human suffering originates in one's attachment to life and in the perpetually unsatisfied yearning to possess happiness. To put an end to suffering is to attain peace ; one must therefore free oneself from desire and eradicate it entirely by embracing a life of virtue and wisdom. In this final truth, the Buddha illuminates the path that humanity must undertake in order to transcend suffering and reach Nirvana — a state of eternal bliss in which desire, ignorance, time and suffering cease to exist altogether.

Karma signifies action, and every action inevitably bears consequences. This represents a fundamental dimension of the laws of cause and effect, directly linked to our experience of happiness and suffering. Neither happiness nor suffering arises arbitrarily. Suffering is never without cause ; rather, it stems from a series of actions carried out by ourselves and others. It is therefore imperative that we act with kindness and benevolence toward our fellow human beings. In his analytical study of world religions, Huston Smith states that : "It is essential that we acknowledge and thoroughly grasp the profound impact that the Buddha's life exerted upon those who followed him and came within his sphere of influence. He masterfully combined the composure of nerve — embodying serenity, rationality, and emotional detachment — with the warmth of feeling — manifested through an intense capacity for tenderness, compassion, and affection. This remarkable equilibrium enabled him to transcend both sentimentality and indifference toward others. He was, without question, one of the greatest rationalists in the annals of history, no less distinguished in this regard than Socrates himself. Every question that presented itself to him was immediately and instinctively subjected to the composed, contemplative, and analytical scrutiny of his intellectual faculties. Each matter was first methodically deconstructed into its fundamental components, before being reassembled into a coherent, logical, and architecturally sound framework, one that enriched its substance and illuminated its deeper significance" (Huston SMITH, 2007, pp144-145).

The Buddha's philosophy upholds the role of reason in one's intellectual life, and his doctrine advocates for freedom of action and personal choice. Buddhists derive greater benefit from their existence when they embrace life more wholeheartedly — a notion that aligns seamlessly with Buddhist thought, as Buddhist philosophy encourages individuals to embark on a journey of self-discovery before freely choosing to join the circle of Buddhist monks and share in their way of life and collective experiences. Buddhism bears no relation to celestial religions and does not center on the divine, unlike Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rather, it focuses on the individual's experience of suffering and pain, and on how one may liberate oneself from a life of misery through the practice of meditation and the purification of the soul. This inner journey ultimately represents the highest Buddhist achievement.

It is a lucid philosophy grounded in awakening the human spirit, enabling it to liberate itself from suffering, without relying on miracles or supernatural forces. As long as an individual possesses a spirit, they hold the capacity to endure, to transcend pain, and to navigate the hardships of life. Ultimately, each person shapes their own destiny — a notion acknowledged by celestial religions as well. "The essence of Buddhism lies in an individual rejection of all forms of revelation and metaphysics, which draws it closer to philosophy" (MALHERBE, 1990, p36). "Buddhism is not a purely religious doctrine, but rather a social philosophy aimed at alleviating human suffering and fostering well-being. It advocates for the abolition of social classes and the establishment of equality among all individuals, rejecting distinctions based on lineage or occupation in favor of those grounded in talent, capability, and merit. No individual holds an advantage over another except through knowledge and the mastery of human will, so as to prevent desires from gaining dominance over it. As a result, Buddhism has not been preoccupied with transcending the natural world. It has not engaged with metaphysical inquiries, and the teachings of the Buddha make no reference to the concept of God or the practice of sacrificial offerings" (Saadoon ASSAMOOK, 2014, p36).

"Buddhism neither addresses the existence of gods nor the prospect of an afterlife in another realm" (Paul CLAVAL, 2010, p182) This is because it stems from an intellectual endeavor undertaken by Buddha in his pursuit of self-purification and spiritual advancement,

making it an entirely human-centered philosophy. "When numerous individuals from socially marginalized and ostracized communities encountered Buddha, they experienced, for the very first time in their lives, a profound sense of being understood and embraced, which rekindled their self-worth and allowed them to reclaim their rightful place within human society" (Huston SMITH, 2007, p146).

"There is little doubt that the Buddha believed he had attained a level of knowledge surpassing that of all his contemporaries. From this standpoint, he simply embraced his own superiority and conducted himself with the self-assurance that such superiority had instilled in him" (Huston SMITH, 2007, p146).

"As his following grew, people gradually lost sight of the fact that his teachings were purely ethical in nature and did not constitute a distinct religion, and that his sole concern was with human conduct. He showed no interest in religious ceremonies, rituals, or supernatural matters. His disciples, however, overlooked this and proceeded to elevate Buddha to divine status; their sacred texts came to refer to him as Lord Buddha and to document the offerings presented in his honor. Paradoxically, despite Buddha's prohibition of idol worship, his followers erected statues of him in temples throughout the land and transformed him into an object of veneration. It was through this process that Buddhism evolved into a formal religion, and that clergy began to interpret his teachings according to their own understanding" (Paul CLAVAL, 2010, p1140).

Buddhism is open to all, without exception: regardless of gender or social background, every Buddhist belongs to the same community in the pursuit of wisdom. It shares with the aforementioned doctrines — Taoism, Confucianism, Mohism and Yang Zhu's philosophy — its universal character, embracing both men and women alike. A defining feature of Chinese philosophies as a whole is their absence of distinction between the sexes, grounded in a principle of equality among all individuals. Gender equality remains the most complex and widely debated issue of our time. "Buddhism perceives life and death as a unified whole, seemingly dual in nature yet fundamentally one. This principle is known as 'interdependent origin,' which essentially conveys that neither aspect of existence can subsist without the other. The physical and the spiritual are mutually dependent, each

requiring the other to exist. Life and death, happiness and suffering, enlightenment and illusion simultaneously coexist across time and space, and are intrinsic to all things" (SGI du CANADA, 2004, p21).

Death occupies a central place in human society, and mankind is confronted with it throughout the course of life. While death can only be approached but never truly experienced, it has perpetually haunted the human mind. Buddhism represents an individual moral path whose purpose is the awakening of the human spirit and its mastery over impulses and desires. It is therefore regarded as a remedy for the causes of human suffering and a philosophical framework for attaining truth. For a considerable period, the world perceived Greek philosophy as the sole intellectual tradition; however, the discovery of Asia unveiled an entirely distinct mode of thought — a profound analysis of reality that elucidates the workings of the mind, examines the nature of being, the world surrounding us, and the intricate relationship between the mind, the body, and the environment. Buddhism is by no means a system of thought disconnected from our way of life ; on the contrary, it bears significant implications for every moment of our existence. Within this tradition lies a remarkably vibrant legacy concerning human values, the manner in which one may strive to embody these values, and the cultivation of understanding and awareness at every instant of one's life.

Most religious laws are widely regarded as lacking in values and meaningful direction, leaving people ensnared in consumerism and materialism, while many individuals find themselves isolated, adrift, and overwhelmed by anxiety. Buddhism, by contrast, offers a profound sense of fulfillment and purpose, transforming every moment of existence into a source of genuine joy. Unlike other traditions, Buddhism does not rely on sacred texts chronicling past events that its followers are expected to emulate ; rather, it constitutes a rational and dynamic framework for continuously adapting to an ever-changing reality. Buddhism is not anchored in the past, nor does it offer a narrative to be passed down through generations. Instead, it presents a way of engaging with the present moment — cultivating self-mastery and pursuing happiness through the embrace of timeless human

values, entirely free from divine or heavenly legislation. It draws solely upon worldly experience, from which the Buddhist practitioner derives wisdom and guidance.

Buddhism and Hinduism :

The ultimate aspiration of Hinduism lies in achieving liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. Regarded as one of the oldest religions in the world, Hinduism counts billions of devoted followers. While Buddhism shares with Hinduism core practices such as meditation, asceticism, moral integrity, and devotion, it distinctly emphasizes the concept of human suffering and the means by which one may transcend it to attain a state of Nirvana. This suffering stems from a fundamental ignorance of the true nature of the universe, and can only be eradicated through the relinquishment of desires and detachment from worldly pursuits. Nirvana represents the state in which an individual is entirely free from desire and, consequently, from suffering. Huston Smith offers the following definition of Nirvana :

"Perpetual, eternal, fixed, immortal, motionless, timeless (without beginning or end), deathless, birthless, unchanging and unchangeable. Nirvana embodies power, grace, happiness, peace, refuge, and invincible security. It stands as the ultimate truth, the most sublime and profound of all truths. It represents pure goodness, the highest aspiration and the sole fulfillment of our existence. It is an eternal, inner, and ineffable peace" (Huston SMITH, 2007, p186).

Nirvana embodies the concepts of enlightenment, awakening, and liberation, a state that the individual may attain upon relinquishing all burdens arising from worldly desires and severing all attachments to the material world, which is inherently bound to consequences. Only within Nirvana may one find true rest. This state cannot be achieved without the practice of meditation, which serves as the pathway to a deeper understanding of both oneself and the world, ultimately freeing the individual from the cycle of birth and death as conceived in Hinduism. Nirvana is accessible to all, representing a state of enlightenment in which every desire ceases to exist. Suffering, in this context, stems from ignorance of the true nature of the universe, and may only be transcended through the overcoming of desires and the release of all attachment to worldly matters.

"Buddhist religious thought has been shaped by certain characteristics of Indian religious thinking, which comes as no surprise given Buddhism's close ties with Hinduism and its original emergence on Indian soil as a reformist movement within Hinduism. As a result, Buddhism does not fundamentally diverge from Hinduism, but rather constitutes a reinterpretation of the question of human suffering and a new perspective on how to alleviate it" (Muhammad KHALIFA HASSAN, 2002, p76).

Buddhism, as a more practical philosophy than Hinduism, was capable of spreading beyond the borders of India, whereas Hinduism turned inward upon itself. "In 65 AD, the existence of a Buddhist community at the court of the Han dynasty was documented. Prior to this, Chinese envoys and soldiers had served in the Buddhist territories of Central Asia. Furthermore, non-Chinese colonies originating from these regions had established themselves in the trading cities of China" (Geoffrey PARRINDER, 1993, p267). "Buddhism consequently flourished through several of its schools : Indian Buddhism became assimilated into Chinese culture, along with its schools, teachers, deities, practices, rituals, and doctrines" (BARBIER-KONTLER, 1996, pp43-44). Chinese philosophical traditions failed to offer clear representations of salvation, despite proposing models of an elevated life that individuals could pursue within nature or society. "Buddhism was able to capitalize on this void" (Frederic LENOIR, 2012, p137).

Indeed, both Taoist and Confucian philosophies address the question of human suffering, each offering a distinct path through which the individual may achieve a more harmonious existence. The former advocates a return to the natural world, while the latter places its emphasis on active engagement within society. Buddhism, however, puts forward an altogether different solution through the practice of meditation. It acknowledges that suffering is inherent to all life, and that one of its primary causes lies in the relentless pursuit of pleasure. An individual may free himself from this suffering by renouncing destructive desires and relinquishing the chase for personal interests, social positions, and material wealth. Buddhism has given rise to a remarkable number of schools, and several factors account for this diversity. First and foremost, Buddhism has encountered a wide array of civilizations and beliefs, which it has consistently approached with respect — including

Hinduism and its pantheon of gods. In China, Taoists and Buddhists have long walked side by side along mountain paths and within monastery walls. In Japan and Tibet, Buddhists have shared sacred spaces with local worshippers without conflict. Furthermore, unlike the so-called religions of the book, Buddhism is not organised around a single foundational text, but rather around a vast collection of writings that explore diverse approaches across multiple languages.

Theravada and Mahayana represent distinct vehicles, or pathways toward liberation. Theravada, known as the Buddhism of the ancients, is predominantly practised in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Mahayana, for its part, is widely established in Vietnam, China, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. The Theravada school has been shaped by Indian cultural influences, whereas the Mahayana school has been moulded by Chinese civilisation, Confucian thought, Taoist philosophy and the notion of balance between heaven and earth. One may also examine the distinctions between Buddhism and Hinduism, two traditions that share a long yet rather complex and uneasy relationship, not unlike that which exists between Judaism and Christianity, or between Christianity and Islam. With regard to the concept of a supreme God, master of the universe, Buddhists do not engage with such a notion ; human beings are instead called upon to direct their attention toward their own suffering and the means by which it may be alleviated. Hinduism, by contrast, acknowledges a plurality of deities, all of whom ultimately remain subordinate to a singular, omnipotent Supreme Being.

"The concept of an impersonal absolute constituting the very essence of all existence — whether referred to as Tathatâ (that which is), or Adibuddha (the primordial Buddha) — permeates every form of Buddhism. It is in this framework that scholars speak of the essence or nature of the Buddha, as well as of Çûnyatâ (emptiness). The deities present within Buddhism (Indra, Brahmâ, among others) correspond to what Hinduism designates as "inferior" divine manifestations, bound to the phenomenal world and therefore incapable of being equated with any form of absolute" (DUFLOS, n° 46-47, p7). Meditation stands as a practice common to both traditions : Buddhism subjects its adherents to a rigorous cultivation of wisdom and morality, with the ultimate aim of attaining Nirvana, while Hindu

women engage in meditation for physical, moral, and spiritual purposes. At its core, meditation involves directing one's awareness inward — not as a withdrawal from the world, but as a means of acting with greater consciousness, pragmatism, discernment, motivation, and alignment with a deeper sense of purpose.

The meditation as described by Ringou Tulku is : "A genuine inner repose, a state of ease, relieving us of the constant need to feel tense. One may also assert that this practice of mental stillness represents the most essential form of preparation : it is not regarded as an end in itself, but rather as a means, as a stepping stone toward deeper insight ; it is not the ultimate goal, yet it holds considerable importance. This meditation is traditionally practiced within a defined framework of time and space. We endeavor to carve out moments in our daily lives — whether in the morning, in the evening, or whenever the opportunity arises — to cultivate a state of inner peace in which we engage in training." (Ringou TULKOU, 1998, pp12-13). Meditation stands as the sole pathway through which ordinary consciousness may be elevated to a state of superconsciousness, granting direct and flawless knowledge of the universe through intuition. Through this practice, the meditator comes to perceive both life and the world through an entirely different lens.

Both doctrines also share the concept of vegetarianism : according to Buddhist belief, one must refrain from inflicting suffering upon any sentient being : "Compassionate love is defined by altruism and benevolence toward all living beings — human and animal, as well as plant and mineral. It is a form of love that one consciously chooses to embody and express based on one's understanding and perception of what is meaningful and constructive. It represents an openness, an inner receptiveness to everything that surrounds us. One might describe it as ascending, vertical, and descending, insofar as it is experienced from disciple to master and vice versa, from one person to another, but also from humanity to every living organism" (CRAPOULET, 2009, p9). The ecological dimension of Buddhist thought can be observed and understood through the Buddha's teachings on nature, and the reverence accorded to the natural world, including trees and flowers. One of Buddhism's foundational principles is therefore respect for oneself, for others, and for the environment. Since all things are interconnected, love implies the rejection of any practice that inflicts

suffering upon others, and consequently, the honoring of all living beings. Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, developed over the centuries, is directly rooted in this very concept. All phenomena are interdependent, and any action undertaken inevitably produces repercussions throughout the whole. The earth is bound to humanity, and ecosystems are intrinsically connected. Contemporary ecological thinking rests upon this same notion of the interdependence of phenomena. In Buddhism, all things are impermanent, interdependent, and relative — a perspective that ultimately aligns with what modern science itself affirms. Among Hindus, deities may manifest in animal form, which is why the slaughter of animals is considered impermissible. Consuming the flesh of an animal is regarded as an act of disrespect toward the gods. Furthermore, the doctrine of reincarnation holds that human beings may be reborn in animal form.

In Hinduism, it is held that individuals are born into a specific social class, with material wealth serving as the determining factor of one's caste, which creates a division between upper and lower classes. Buddhism, by contrast, upholds no such distinctions : every individual is regarded as equal, and equality stands as a foundational principle of this doctrine. Buddhism was among the earliest philosophical traditions in the world to address the challenge of combating racism and antisemitism. Buddhists are committed to education, prevention, and the promotion of awareness. The fostering of hostility and hatred toward others is strictly prohibited. The rationale behind this principle is straightforward : contempt for those who are different or foreign has caused immeasurable suffering throughout history, while never having resolved a single problem.

Buddhism and Taoism :

Taoism is a Chinese philosophical movement whose founding thinkers cherish a deep connection with nature, harbor a skepticism toward social conventions, and embrace a distinctly libertarian outlook. Rather than a mere set of beliefs, Taoism constitutes a comprehensive philosophy and a particular way of approaching existence, in which every phenomenon arises as the natural consequence of what has preceded it. For Taoist sages, contemplating the universe holds the key to understanding the human organism: all things undergo change with remarkable regularity. Nothing in existence remains static ; life

perpetually evolves and transforms, and so too do societies. It is therefore by maintaining harmony with one's environment and adapting to its continuous changes that one may not only preserve good health, but also attain the highest degrees of well-being and personal fulfillment. Taoism is rooted in the concept of the Tao, meaning "the Way" — that is, the manner in which things ought to be, encompassing social, moral, and political principles. It represents the order of society, the embodiment of virtue, and the proper code of conduct. The Tao is regarded as the fundamental reality underlying the universe and the expression of its supreme principles. "The Tao originally signified the higher principle of existence : it was therefore associated with the idea of vital and creative power, as well as with that of moral rule" (Leon de ROSNY, 1892, p98).

Buddhism and Confucianism :

Regarding the relationship between Buddhism and Confucian philosophy, while a number of differences exist, both doctrines have historically coexisted within China. Confucianism is an exclusively Chinese school of thought, founded by Confucius, though he was not its sole proponent; several of his disciples, along with notable figures such as Mengzi, also contributed to its development. Confucianism emphasises the bonds between individuals and, by extension, within society as a whole. Buddhism, as previously outlined, focuses on the relationship between the individual and their inner self, centred on personal awakening. For the Chinese, these two sets of teachings may be regarded as complementary : Confucianism addresses human behaviour and social conduct, whereas Buddhism concerns itself with the connection to one's inner being and the pursuit of self-enlightenment. The synthesis and integration of these teachings into a unified whole constitutes the very essence of Chinese culture. Although Confucian thought, and more particularly neo-Confucian currents, holds a predominant place in contemporary China, Buddhism nonetheless continues to exert a considerable influence. According to Muhammad Khalifa Hassan in **History of Religions**: "Buddhism failed to subordinate the moral and legal framework of the Chinese ruling class. It appeared to stand in opposition to Confucian moral philosophy, which conceives of man as a living being engaged in clearly defined human affairs and habitual daily conduct that must be governed by moral principles. Buddhism, for its part,

directs its attention toward death rather than life. It repudiates existence in the earthly realm, viewing it as a source of suffering and misery, and addresses this condition by advocating the renunciation of the world and the dissolution of the self in Nirvana. Confucianism, by contrast, is firmly anchored in the world and centres on how one ought to conduct oneself within it and how such conduct should be structured in accordance with moral principles" (Muhammad KHALIFA HASSAN, 2002, p160).

According to Buddhist philosophy, achieving Nirvana represents the sole means of definitively transcending suffering. In Confucianism, inner peace manifests through the cultivation of virtues within the social sphere. Furthermore, Buddhism places its emphasis on the individual self, whereas Confucianism is primarily concerned with the role of the individual within society. The ultimate aspiration of Buddhism lies in the attainment of Nirvana, while Confucianism seeks the realization of social harmony. "Following in the footsteps of Indian Buddhism, the Chinese schools flourish in a vision of the world and the paths to salvation" (BARBIER-KONTLER, 1996, p167). During the Medieval period, Confucianism endeavoured to reassert itself under a renewed form, giving rise to Neo-Confucianism: "The attempt by philosophers, from the tenth century A.D. onwards, to confront Buddhism with a higher and more complete philosophy" (John KOLLER, 1995, p328). "Today, Buddhism in China has provoked emotional reactions: there are still faithful Chinese Buddhists who deny or ignore the Indian origins of their beliefs, just as there are Buddhists or Buddhist sympathisers throughout the world who simply deny or ignore the 'Buddhist' character of Chinese schools" (BARBIER-KONTLER, 1996, p46).

Eventually, Buddhism endeavoured to permeate Chinese society, much as Confucianism and Taoism had done before it, and achieved considerable success in doing so, embedding certain concepts rooted in the Buddha's teachings — such as the notion of life through reincarnation, and the means by which one may transcend suffering in order to attain Nirvana. Buddhist reincarnation is, however, distinct from its Hindu counterpart; according to the Buddha, reincarnation signifies the transition of the self from one state of being to another, attained through the deepening of meditative practice as a means of purification. Its dissemination was greatly facilitated by the solace it offered to populations

devastated by conflict and war, promising deliverance from suffering at a time when the Chinese people were enduring exceptionally harsh conditions. Buddhist philosophy advocates a return to the inner self through the sustained practice of meditation, which is understood to cultivate wisdom and awareness, ultimately leading to a state of enlightenment. Chinese civilisation demonstrated a remarkable capacity to assimilate Buddhism and recast it in a distinctly Chinese form, skilfully adapting its principles to the particular demands of Chinese society, thereby giving rise to a new and uniquely Sinicised expression of Buddhist thought.

This capacity is distinctive of China, and is currently being demonstrated across various civilisations worldwide, as evidenced by its remarkable ability to permeate and adapt to diverse societies despite the profound differences between them. The key to this success resides in drawing upon the philosophies and theories generated by human thought, as these constitute the genuine driving force behind Asian societies, in contrast to Islamic or Western societies, whose philosophical frameworks struggle to find practical application. Furthermore, the issues surrounding sacred texts have long been a matter of scholarly debate. In Buddhism, ethics is grounded in the principle that actions of body, speech and mind carry consequences for both the individual and those around them. The practice of ethics is thus regarded as a process of spiritual purification, a notion that Confucianism shares with Buddhism, the latter having subsequently re-emerged in a renewed form.

If man truly aspires to eternal rest — for Buddhism, like Taoism and Confucianism, acknowledges the infinity of the world, its vastness, depth and wholeness, as well as the noble purpose of man's existence within it — he must strive to rid himself of all the impurities inherent to worldly life. In this pursuit, it is neither nature, as Taoism contends, nor society and the cultivation of virtue within it, as Confucianism proposes, that will lead man to happiness. Rather, the answer resides within man himself, regardless of whether he dwells in nature or society. He alone holds the power to shape his own destiny and attain a state of spiritual purity, through which he will find true happiness and secure a worthy existence beyond death. It is precisely this that sets Buddhism apart from its philosophical predecessors, Taoism and Confucianism. Given that Chinese society has, since the very dawn

of its civilisation, consistently aspired to a life of wisdom and moral integrity, Buddhism found fertile ground among the Chinese people, as it places virtue and wisdom at the very heart of its teaching.

In **Ancient Eastern Thought**, John Koller illustrates how Buddhism was able to capitalize on the shortcomings of both Taoism and Confucianism. He argues : "Chinese philosophers proved unable to reconcile systematic theoretical rigor with a thorough account of how to navigate the practical affairs of everyday life. Taoism rested on relatively broad foundations, yet its philosophy remained too abstract to lend itself to practical application. Confucianism, for its part, offered an abundance of detailed precepts serving as a guide to conduct, but the theoretical underpinnings of these prescriptions were ultimately inadequate. Buddhism, by contrast, proved sufficiently compelling and intellectually stimulating to captivate Chinese scholars and thinkers, to the point where it was rendered not merely into the Chinese language, but into Chinese philosophical categories altogether" (John KOLLER, 1995, pp381-382).

The Buddhist framework invites us to cultivate an awareness of the fundamental interconnection between consciousness, the body, and the environment — that is, between the universe and all living beings. Within this Buddhist way of life, personal happiness is intrinsically bound to the well-being of others, as it cannot be built upon their suffering or misfortune. Science, broadly speaking, focuses primarily on external phenomena — identifying relationships, observing and explaining occurrences, uncovering causes, and predicting behaviour — thereby expanding human knowledge. However, it shows little concern for the inner self ; that domain falls more within the realm of psychology, which is largely devoted to the study of behaviour. Buddhism, by contrast, has long been committed to inward exploration, approaching it with remarkable depth, seriousness, methodological rigour, and unwavering dedication. Buddhism is a long-term discipline that brings about enduring transformation. It functions as an inner laboratory, firmly grounded in direct personal experience — and therein lies its singular value. Our exploration of Buddhism further reveals that the revered sages around whom communities gather enjoy no material comfort : they receive no income, hold no financial assets, and do not convene in temples for

monetary gain. They dwell in remote places — on mountaintops and in desolate, uninhabited regions — entirely free from financial resources. Unlike figures from other religious traditions, they maintain no presence on television, radio, or social media, and live in deliberate detachment from material possessions.

"The purpose of Buddhism is neither the acquisition of material wealth, nor the pursuit of veneration, nor the achievement of the highest moral standards. Its ultimate goal is the liberation of the human spirit. In this regard, it developed along a distinct path from Taoist and Confucian philosophy, yet managed to establish itself in ancient China, despite sharing certain common ground with Taoism — most notably in its Sufi dimension and in the practice of asceticism and the transcendence of worldly matters. It gradually gathered followers and came to challenge, and ultimately surpass, the disciples of Confucius and Lao Tzu, eventually prevailing and spreading across China, largely owing to its belief in life after death, known as "Nirvana". The Chinese were deeply eager to understand their own fate and that of their ancestors, whose spirits they held in great reverence — a concern that neither Taoism nor Confucianism adequately addressed" (Saadoon ASSAMOOK, 2006, p116). To conclude, Chinese culture presents us with 5,000 years of history — a history shaped by ruptures and transformations, but also by exchanges that gave rise to numerous schools of thought, among them Buddhism. China stands as one of the great poles of human experience: an ancient civilisation that has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to endure through the ages, continually sustained by its own rich tradition.

Buddhism is a spiritual path devoted to understanding humanity's purpose and the reasons for our earthly existence, as well as to the attainment of liberation from suffering. Within Buddhism, the figure of the Buddha is not singular; throughout the ages, numerous Buddhas have descended upon the earth to guide humanity along the righteous path of wisdom and deliverance. While their teachings have taken varied forms to accommodate different eras, places and cultural traditions, their essence has remained unwavering, steadfast and enduring. They have all proclaimed the same eternal truth, centred upon the purification of the spirit through a philosophical approach. The method advocated by the adherents of this doctrine relies upon reason as the means of transcending any crisis. The

ultimate goal is to free oneself from all emotions, all patterns of self-centred thinking and all vestiges of selfish desire, while renouncing pride, hatred, vengeance, violence and resentment. It is through this process that the light of truth may reveal itself in its full magnificence. The Buddhist tradition concerns itself with the human spirit, the intelligence of all beings, the dynamic force of movement and the power inherent in all energy.

Buddha stood among the rare founders of philosophical traditions and spiritual paths who never claimed to be anything more than a simple human being. While other masters presented themselves as divine incarnations or professed to be guided by God, Buddha neither elevated himself above humanity nor asserted that he was moved by any external force. He attributed all of his achievements and the wisdom he had attained solely to human endeavour and intellectual capacity. Buddha may rightfully be regarded as the philosopher par excellence — so remarkably complete in his humanity that popular religious sentiment has been tempted to elevate him to a superhuman status. According to Buddhist thought, the human condition holds the highest position ; man is the sovereign of his own existence. No superior being, no transcendent power governs him or determines his fate. He earnestly urged his disciples to seek refuge within themselves, rather than looking to any outside source for guidance or assistance. Through his teachings, he inspired and motivated each individual to strive actively toward their own liberation. Man possesses, through personal effort and the exercise of intelligence, the capacity to free himself from all forms of bondage. If the Buddha is referred to as a saviour, it is solely in the sense that he uncovered and illuminated the path leading to liberation and the attainment of Nirvana. It is precisely this principle of individual responsibility that led the Buddha to grant his disciples complete freedom of thought — a freedom unparalleled in the history of ideas and spiritual tradition. Such freedom is essential, for man's emancipation rests upon his own direct understanding of truth, rather than upon divine grace bestowed as a reward for pious and obedient behaviour. In Buddhism, the roots of all evil lie in ignorance and misguided beliefs. It is unquestionable that progress cannot be achieved in the presence of doubt, confusion, and uncertainty. Equally undeniable is the fact that doubt persists as long as understanding remains incomplete and clarity is absent. Yet, in order to advance, a Buddhist must inevitably

overcome doubt — and to achieve this, they must attain clear insight. Tolerance is a profoundly valued and well-understood concept in Buddhism, and has stood from the very beginning as one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilisation. In countries where monotheistic religions predominate, people frequently question whether Buddhism constitutes a religion or a philosophy. There is a tendency among people to favour labels that discriminate, even when applied to qualities and feelings that are universally shared across humanity. The worth or shortcoming of a quality is neither enhanced nor diminished by the religious affiliation of the person who embodies it. For a sincere seeker of truth, the origin of an idea is of little consequence — tracing the source or evolution of a thought belongs to the domain of the historian. It is therefore irrelevant whether a teaching originates from the Buddha or from another source. What truly matters is the capacity to perceive and comprehend the truth itself. All religions are grounded in faith. Buddhism, however, places its emphasis on vision, knowledge, and understanding as the means to transcend suffering and face it with courage. It is a faith rooted in the conviction that the pursuit of enlightenment is a tangible force, one that can be sought and embraced, and therefore remains within reach of every individual. The Buddha's teachings are designed to guide humanity toward security, peace, happiness, and an understanding of Nirvana. Every aspect of his doctrine was oriented toward this purpose ; he did not concern himself with matters intended merely to satisfy intellectual curiosity. As an extraordinary teacher, he imparted only what would bring peace and happiness to mankind. Buddhism therefore showed little interest in metaphysical debates, which, from a Buddhist perspective, are purely speculative in nature and give rise to imaginary dilemmas. Such subjects, in their view, lead only to an endless maze of opinions. They yield no practical benefit to the individual — only assertions that demand validation and proof before any truth can be established. Yet that truth remains perpetually out of reach, for this world is elusive to us ; we do not truly inhabit it, and as such, it defies our full comprehension.

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