

## COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS: BUDDHISM, *INBETWEENNESS*, ISLAM AND TAOISM

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Comparative philosophy joyfully and delightfully demonstrates the wholeness of it all. It bridges the gaps among human-made multiplicities of diversity into a universal oneness. Comparative philosophy opens the door for dialogue between different cultures and promotes understanding of the others' way of life in bringing their similarities and differences to the table of dialogue. The purpose of this article is to promote such understanding. This understanding does not only serve as the path to concrete knowledge but also as a promotion of respect, admiration and above all inspiration. This definitely is a reminder of Gandhi's philosophy that religions are different paths leading to the same end. It does not matter which one we take as long as we reach the same goal.

There are four systems of thought discussed here: Buddhism, *Inbetweenness*, Islam and Taoism. Buddhism sees the world as a process of interdependent existence. *Inbetweenness* sees existence as an interconnectedness of movement and vibrations. Islam sees this life only as a part of a bigger happening. This part is coming to the bodily human form and going back to the source. Taoism sees this existence as the harmonic balance of opposites, which are manifestations of Tao.

The Buddhist interpretation of existence is psychological rather than metaphysical. Buddhism sees this psychological process as an interconnectedness of interdependent arising. Interdependent arising could be explained as follows: this rises, that rises; this decays, that decays. Nothing also goes out of existence solely and for no reason. An event takes place because one or more events cause it to do so. It also means that a phenomenon takes place because one or more phenomena give it existence. This is the vision of Buddhism since it does not believe in a personal god as a creator who exists outside this process. If this god existed, it would be inside the dimensionality of this process, so to speak and it would be changeable. If this god changed, it would not be a god to begin with. This is due to the fact that the world is change. Everything, when it comes to Buddhism, is traced back to interdependent arising. Nothing, Buddhism talks of, exists outside this process.

Buddhism started as a solution to the problematic of human suffering. It traces this suffering back to original human ignorance. Simply, suffering rises because ignorance rises. When ignorance decays, suffering will eventually decay. This means that everything is interconnected through rising and falling, which are forms of movement and vibration.

Buddhism also subscribes to the Noble Eightfold Path as the solution to suffering. This path consists of the right view, right intention, right speech, right

action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. When interdependent arising and the eightfold path are understood, one is ultimately led to Nirvana, which is a state of bliss. The way to Nirvana starts with the eightfold path, advances to what is called Dharmakaya. Dharmakaya is a term that describes religious consciousness or Buddha's original body. Humans reach that state when they become spiritually enlightened. This is beyond following the eightfold path. It is doing what is good because it is the only way to be. Simply, it is the spiritual participator's way of being.

*Inbetweenness* is the plane of endless interconnected possibilities of existents of movement and vibration. This is of course, not a place. It is a plane where the limitations of dimensionality do not apply. In this plane, everything is movement and vibration. This ranges from the most solid entities all the way to pure spirit. A solid entity is formed by the least vibration, so to speak, whereas pure spirit is the highest in vibration. All existents are energy. The matter of any substance is energy. Matter is not even substantial. Any changes affecting any existent are due to change in energy which is driven by movement and vibration. The process of ice melting, for example, is due to change in its vibration. Simply, the quantum properties of water vibrate more than those of ice. This vibration is what makes ice out of water.

This plane consists of interconnected possibilities that make up the wholeness of it all. This interconnectedness of the cosmos constitutes the way humans act. Being a part of this wholeness, as humans, every action affects this wholeness. This gives rise to the idea of humans as spiritual participators. Doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong as rules and regulations are even beneath the possibility of a spiritual participator. The spiritual participator's way of being is self-regulating.

The third theme is the Islamic religion. The spiritual advancement of humans, according to the Quran and Hadith, is of three steps. These three steps are Al-Islam, Al-Iman and Al-Ehsan.

The word Islam comes from the root Silm, which literally means the condition of peace. Islam is usually defined as the submission to Allah by acknowledging the oneness of it all, following Allah with total obedience and the total dismissal of polytheism. To do this is also to perform the known Islamic duties such as praying.

Iman is a step higher than Islam. The word Iman literally means belief. Iman is usually defined as the total belief in Allah, his angels, his scriptures (books), his messengers, judgment day and predestination. The term "his books" includes the Bible and the testaments of Ibrahim. The term "his messengers" includes Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, Solomon, Joseph. This, according to the religion of Islam is even higher than praying and only believing in the Quran and Mohammad's teachings.

The last and highest advancement that every Muslim should aspire to reach is Ehsan. Ehsan is when one worships Allah, for example, as if one sees Allah. If one cannot see Allah; Allah still sees that person. This represents the interconnectedness of it all. It is being one within the One; being with the Source of it all. This if understood, the Quranic verse that describes murdering one person is the same as murdering the whole of humanity would be understood.

Ehsan is simply the spiritual participator's way of being. When it comes to the religion of Islam, the spiritual participator's way is understanding the wholeness of it all by being a part of it. This is again beyond regulations. Everything exists as a result of Allah's creation and at the end returns to Allah. Simply, it is an interconnected cycle of coming into the world and going back to the Source.

Taoism is a Chinese system of thought that sees everything as a manifestation of Tao. Tao is not a personal god; it is the Ultimate Reality. Everything is a manifestation of Tao in two opposite forms. The two forms representing the oneness of everything are Yin and Yang. Yin represents the feminine characteristics of any phenomenon. The yang represents the masculinity of that same phenomenon. It is considered that the yin represents the breath that created the earth, whereas yang is the breath that formed the heavens.

Both yin and yang are symbolized by a circle where each represents half. Yin and yang represent woman and man, hot and cold, soft and hard. A deeper look into this Chinese symbol will uncover the fact that the yin has some yang in it and the opposite is also true. This is seen where the yin, the dark half, has a light spot in it. The yang, the light half, has a dark spot in it. Both are interconnected.

The reason of all problems is the unbalance of the yin and yang. If the weight is higher on either side, harmony ceases to be. Overall harmony is achieved through the balance and oneness of the two opposites. This could be explained using the sign of Taoism, water. The ocean, for example, has waves that come into the shore and go back out into the ocean. This represents harmony. If the waves of the ocean go in unnaturally far beyond the shore, tsunami and flooding will take place. If the waves of that same ocean go out unnaturally into the ocean, aquatic life will be disturbed. The ocean cannot neglect the Way of coming in and going out. If it did, it would not be an ocean to begin with.

This harmony resembles the way the spiritual participator is according to Taoism. It is the way where everything stays natural according to The Tao. This spiritual participator, within Taoism, realizes the oneness and interconnectedness of it all. This participator understands the importance of Wu-Wei or non-ado. This is doing everything without doing anything. Put simply, it is doing everything naturally according to the Way of things, the Tao.

It would be insightful to consider the following Taoist story, which truly represents how an enlightened participator would view this existence. Once there was a small wave somewhere in the ocean. The wave was very unhappy and complaining, “why am I so small and weak? Why am I not like the other waves around me, huge and mighty?” Another wave comes by and hears the complaining wave. The second wave asks, “why do you think you are an unhappy small wave? In fact, you are neither unhappy nor an actual wave!” The small wave is totally puzzled answering, “yes! I am a wave; cannot you see me. Look at me.” The second wave says, “all what I see is water. You think you are a wave because you are only seeing your impermanent form. You, I and all what you see here as waves are just water. Only when you realize that you are the ocean, you will be free of your unhappiness.”

It is significant to stress that with *Inbetweenness* a spiritual participator does not act a certain way because this participator is following laws or regulations of any sort. This participator does not act appropriately only because of the mere belief of a certain religion. The spiritual participator acts appropriately because this behavior results from a way of being not a way of following or abiding. This way of being, which gives rise to such behavior, rises out of the understanding of the wholeness and oneness of everything. This is due to the fact that spirituality cuts across and even goes beyond all religions. Therefore, the spiritual participator has the understanding that religions are only different paths toward the same end. Sunnie D. Kidd puts it this way:

We can now ask whether it is ever possible to distinguish experience from the interpretation of it. If not, it is unclear how any experience can be said to be self-assuring. The idea that the religious experience is independent of any interpretation of it can lead to the claim that there is an underlying unity of all religions, that different religions are simply different forms of truth. If religious experience is itself universal and independent of any particular religion’s interpretation of it, then not all religions are derived from the same experience but point to a dimension of existence which is beyond religion itself. This is the spiritual realm of *Inbetweenness*. The spiritual is the fundamental ground of religion and each religion is a different form of it.<sup>1</sup>

- 1) Sunnie D. Kidd, “*Inbetweenness: The Indivisible Whole*”, *Supervisor.Com*, 1 August 2002; Cf. *Inbetweenness.Com* 2006.