

THE CASE FOR BUDDHISM AS A RELIGION

(Excerpted from a Treatise)

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WHEN HUMAN life first came into existence on this earth it was the search for truth which led to the development of civilization. Throughout recorded history different races and nations have given birth to a wide variety of cultures and beliefs. At first, it was the philosophy of these various cultures, which explained the value and significance of life. Soon after, philosophy was transcended by religion. The motivating force behind human civilization is both material and spiritual. But it was through philosophy and religion, with the search for an understanding of reality by individual philosophers and saints, that religious doctrines came to exist. Regardless of whether it was inferior or superior, shallow or deep, a doctrine had been formed in search of the truth. Hence, doctrine is the first of Nichiren Daishonin's five principles of religion.¹

Buddhism is known as the Inner Way, while other religions are referred to as the Outer Way. It is with these distinctions that the superiority or inferiority of Buddhism may be judged. The determining factor for making this decision is the Law of cause and effect and whether it is recognized or denied. Also, if the Law of cause and effect is accepted is it in a form which is eternal or transient? This is the main point in deciding the superiority of a faith.

Within the doctrine of materialism, which denies the existence of faith and spiritual values, is it possible to justifiably explain the internal force and external influence which is present in all life

¹ Five principles of a religion - (*goko*) Teaching, Understanding, Time, Country and Method of transmission

and phenomena? Also, if the supremacy of materialism is to be recognized, how is it possible that mankind, if governed by this doctrine, is capable of attaining salvation? The materialists have yet to produce an explanation which is acceptable to people of religious faith. Materialism is clearly something which at the most only covers one aspect of our existence, while the people who advocate this way of thinking can find neither physical nor spiritual salvation.

In religions such as Christianity with their teachings of one god as an absolute creator, the existence of cause and effect is something which is not clearly shown. Other religions as well do not explain the links of causation and disregard the law of cause and effect. Because of this they cannot describe or logically explain the reason for mankind needing to live in the way of righteousness. They are also unable to demonstrate the real meaning of our existence. Such questions are all covered in the teachings of Buddhism. Although it may be reasonable to believe in a god as a creator, this belief does little to impart security or peace of mind.

In the theories of philosophers of Europe and the Orient (those scholars who had dedicated themselves to the accumulation of knowledge in the search for the true form of existence), it seems that some conclusions have been reached which come very near to the truth; even to the stage of revealing the path to enlightenment and explaining the reason behind cause and effect. But this is merely a glimpse of one moment in the present, they cannot explain the law of cause and effect as it occurs in the world of the past and the world of the future.

In contrast with these religions and philosophies which represent the Outer Way, Buddhism teaches the law of causality as it occurs in the three existence of past, present and future, explaining the true form of phenomena and the existence of all things which both can and cannot be perceived. This forms one of the basic doctrines of Buddhism. It can be easily understood by studying the three concepts of : 1) all things being transient; 2) all phenomena being illusory; and 3) Nirvana² being quiescent. Since the faith of the Inner Way teaches the logic of cause and effect, through which the existence of Buddha is proven and the existence of God, an external diety, can be disproven, its superiority is established over all other religions and philosophies.

² Nirvana - In True Buddhism nirvana means an enlightened condition of life in the present world, based on faith in the Gohonzon. Nichiren Daishonin explained that by chanting *Namu-myoho-rence-kyo* one can manifest his inherent Buddhahood and attain the state of nrvana without escaping the cycle of brith and death.