

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SALVATION IN CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM.

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Abstract

Everybody wishes to achieve a state of perfect peace where there will be no suffering. Such a state is recognised to be 'salvation' in both Buddhism and Christianity. To attain salvation is considered to be the ultimate aim of human life in both Buddhism and Christianity. The question raised here is "Is it really possible that such a salvation can be attained?" It is very difficult to convince some modern people, there is no doubt that if any one strives to attain it by adopting the right methods, it is possible to succeed. Both Buddhism and Christianity teach the pathway leading to salvation.

All over the world people are living in distressed conditions; there is no place for them in human society. They are afflicted by many problems related to either the mind or the body and they are forced to struggle against horrible situations. They are still hoping to escape from this damnation and are endeavouring from time to time to find a way how to solve these problems. As a matter of fact, the external means of material comforts are not sufficient to generate lasting peace and happiness; they depend, exclusively, upon the inward revolution. Therefore as Narada Maha Thera says; "Real happiness is found within and is not to be defined in terms of wealth, power, honours or conquests."¹

In a similar way Dr. Radha Krishnan says; "Jesus demands inward renewal and inner change. The Kingdom of Heaven is not a place but a state of mind."² In the same manner Lord Buddha also says in the Sutra; "Buddha evolves from the good mind so, one must salute one's own mind."³ In short, in the view of both Buddha and Christ, bondage and salvation depend upon the state of the mind and in order to create a state of perfect peace, one should endeavour to cure the inner ailment. This is the central teaching of both Buddha and Christ.

1. Narada Mahathera; *The Buddha and His Teachings*. P 179

2. Dr. Radha Krishnan; *Recovery of Faith*. P 115

3. Buddha; *Sutra*.

BONDAGE

This disastrous situation forces us to explore the real source of suffering. According to Christianity the so called 'original sin' is considered to be at the root of all human suffering. This sin was committed by Adam, the for-father of mankind. He disobeyed the Divine authority, ate the forbidden fruit and strayed from God's will. As a result of this he lost God's love and grace. He was deprived of his sanctuary and driven out of Paradise. Thus he became mortal and would have to bear final punishment for his sins on the day of Judgement. The Bible says; "You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day."⁴ Professor Tiwari also says; "Adam's sin, the original sin, is sin for every man and that sin is the main cause of human suffering."⁵

If the original sin is the root cause of human suffering, then the following questions arise. Why did Adam commit the sin? How was it transmitted to all mankind?

According to Christianity man is made by God in his own image. It signifies that man has been chosen to help in the building of the Kingdom of Heaven all over the world. This is the main purpose of God's creation. Man is endowed with an immortal soul, intelligence and free will. The spirit of man is called the candle of the Lord. It differentiates man from other animal creations. Free will plays an important role in all human activities.

The first humans, Adam and Eve, lived in the garden of Eden. However the devil in the form of a snake tempted them to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. He criticised the restrictions that God had placed on Adam and Eve and explained the benefits of eating the fruit. The Bible says; "That's not true; you will not die. God said that because he knows that when you eat it you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad."⁶ With this provocation, the evil attitudes, i.e. pride, lust, etc. sprang into their minds. At the same time they misused their free-will, plucked the forbidden fruit from the tree and ate it. In doing so they defied God's command and committed the first sin. Professor Tiwari says; "Here two factors in a combined fashion became responsible for evil - The devilish provocation of Satan and the utter mis-use of the free will granted to them."⁷

The gene is the medium through which the original sin is transmitted from Adam to all the succeeding human race. Thus man is

4. The Bible; Genesis, ch.2, v17.

5. K.N. Tiwari; Comparative Religion. P 139.

6. The Bible; Genesis, ch.3, vv4-5.

7. K.N. Tiwari; Comparative Religion. P 140.

born with certain evil taints, i.e. lust, anger, jealousy and so on. It is obvious that a young baby expresses his anger when he does not get his milk. Professor D. Smith says; "The sin that all men committed when Adam sinned; as his death made all men mortal, likewise his sin made men sinful."⁸ Similarly Denny also says; "The guilt of the first transgression is reckoned in its consequences upon all the races represented by the first transgressor. But apart from their own sin, all are not regarded as sinners but made sinners also through the inheritance of the nature of itself inclined only to live."⁹

The sanctity of the human soul is distorted by committing the original sin. As a result man falls down from Paradise and becomes subject to death. The soul does not perish with the physical death, but has to wait to be resurrected at the Day of Judgement.

The bondage is nothing more than a strange human phenomenon which is explained by Christianity as the state of original sin or the fallen state. Antony states; "In the case of religious liberation, nobody has a clear idea as to the state of 'Slavery' or 'Bondage' from which the victim has to be liberated. A Christian would refer to it as original sin, the devil, the fallen state or Hell."¹⁰

A Christian believes in the one life theory and has no room for the concept of the pre-existence of the soul. That is why, in a Christian's view, the human being is newly created by God at the time of conception. If this is the case, it would be difficult to posit the evil passions which grow in the newly created mind or soul and the original sin, committed by Adam, could not be transmitted to the succeeding generations. If the original sin belongs exclusively to the body, it would not be the main obstruction to salvation, as the body dissolves into dust at the time of death. The body will not endure along with the immortal soul and consequently it cannot be justified that the original sin is the main impediment from entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

According to Buddhism all problems start from ignorance, the mental defilement. That is how every person has the conception of 'I'. It ignores the real nature of 'I' and mistakenly thinks 'I' exists on its own or independently. In fact this is not so. A person has an intense attachment towards his relatives due to holding this conception, and does all sorts of evil deeds for their benefit. If anyone harms his relatives or their property he becomes angry and hates them. As a result he is gripped with the three poisons: ignorance, attachment and

8. D Smith; *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*. P 338.

9. Denne; *James Husting Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*. V5, P 705.

10. Antony; *Buddhism and Christianity; their inner affinity*.

hatred. Hence Chanrakirti says; "Homage to that compassion for migrators who are powerless like a bucket travelling in a well, although initially adhering to a self as an 'I' and then generating attachment for things; 'This is mine'." ¹¹

When one becomes a slave of the three poisons, many kinds of negative motivations arise in the mind. They encourage the person to perform evil deeds whenever the circumstances are suitable. Any action remains in the active form for a short period and it leaves a deep impression upon the mental continuum when it loses its intensity. It lives in a potent form until its fruit ripens. No action is completed without begetting its fruit and it waits for a suitable occasion to blossom. Hence Lord Buddha says;

*"All actions for a hundred aeons,
Remain unexhausted, condition and time
Find, all sentient beings,
Have to experience their fruits."* ¹²

There is nothing in the world which would exempt a being from suffering, because everything is the product of Karmic forces. The so-called external world is composed of atoms and the force in the atom which either attracts or repels things, comes from the Karma. The moving force in the atom is inserted by the conscious mind and therefore the evolution and involution of the world depends upon Karmic energy. Vasubhandu says; "The different world systems are originated by the Karma." ¹³ In other words, in the outside world nothing exists individually because the universe is a simple process of the inter-connected activities of the mind and matter. A single object is nothing more than a mental illusion. Saint Nagar Juna says; "For them (the Hungry ghosts) even the moon is hot in the summer, while the sun is cold in the winter. The trees become fruitless and the rivers dry up when they looked upon them." ¹⁴ In the same way Acharya Shantideva says; "The burning iron base is created by whom? From where to the crowded women come? Buddha says 'That all the things come out of the evil mind'." ¹⁵

Some modern scientists also support this fact. Wigner asserts that it is impossible to give a description of quantum mechanical

11. Chandrakirti; Madhyamikavatra.

12. Lord Buddha; Sutra.

13. Vasubhandu; Abhidharma.

14. Nagarjuna; A Friendly Letter. St.95.

15. Shantideva; A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life. Ch.5, St.15.

processes without explicit reference to consciousness. Sir James Jen makes the assertion that the mind may be the creator and governor of the realm of matter. Jack Sarfatti also states an idea of the utmost significance for the development of the psycho-energetic system is that the structure of matter may not be independent of consciousness.¹⁶

All Buddhist schools unanimously accept that Karma is endowed with a tremendous potency which produces everything to be found in this mundane world. Do not hope to receive real peace and happiness through utilising worldly things or lusting for worldly comforts which eventually result in frustration.

The sentient being is imprisoned in the wheel of life and suffers incessantly. The wheel is comprised of twelve links and one has to revolve through the circle until liberation is achieved, as one's psycho-physical perpetual process starts from ignorance. Wherever one lives in the world, one has to cross each miserable stage in turn. Among the twelve conditions, ignorance, craving, and clinging are afflictions, action and existence are deeds, and the other seven are sufferings. As long as nescience is ingrained in one's mind there is no hope to receive real peace and happiness, only trouble and mental anguish. That is why action rises out of nescience and then one can gradually rise through all the other conditions. Lord Buddha says; "When this is, that arises, for instance out of ignorance action arises."¹⁷ In the same way Nagarjun says; "If there is birth, then a very great heap of suffering ensues, such as sorrow, disease, old age, frustration, fear of death etc."¹⁸

SALVATION

In Christianity salvation means when man is saved from his present fallen status. In other words it is when man is able to regain his original status when he had eternal fellowship with God. The first man, Adam, lost his original status by sinning and through him, all mankind became sinners and subject to death. Because of this it became necessary for mankind to attain salvation from sin and punishments. One must ascend from mortal to immortal status. William L. Reese says; "From the Latin 'salare' (to save) the Christian term for that state in which man is redeemed, reconciled to God."¹⁹

In a word salvation means renewal and in order to attain salvation one must get inner positive change. Man's inward nature is

16. C.F. Michael Talbot; *Mysticism and New Physics*. P 35-36.

17. Nagarjuna; *A Friendly Letter*. St.11.

18. Buddha; *The Rice Seedling Sutra*.

19. William L Reese; *The Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*. P 506

distorted with numerous evil attitudes; viz: anger, lust, anxiety and so on. Professor Antony says; "Through his insight into concrete human nature, Christ clearly saw that many people were unable to accept adult responsibility in life and act as free noble beings, because they were continually thwarted by feelings of inner anxiety and despair."²⁰

These kinds of inner faults are major impediments to salvation. Salvation is not given from the outside and will evolve from the human's inner core. That is why one must purify one's mind through wiping out the mental evils. Dr. Radna Krishnan says; "It is the attainment of truth which makes for freedom or liberation. Jesus refers to inner perfecting, the possible evolution of man."²¹

The '*summum bonum*' of mankind is to transform into a spiritual being. He lives in Paradise with a divine body which never decays. He is free from sins and sufferings and enjoys perfect peace and bliss in fellowship with God. This state is called eternal or immortal life. Hughes says; "God's ultimate purpose is the creation of a moral universe of free self conscious beings, who shall live in loving fellowship with him, and shall do his will gladly and spontaneously."²² In the same way F. Antony says; "The Kingdom refers primarily to the qualitateness of the life of an individual who has evolved from a childish behaviour to an adult one."²³

The so-called salvation is the realization of resurrection in the Kingdom of Heaven. The resurrected body is spiritual, and not a material one. His original stainless nature is revived on the Day of Judgement and he becomes qualified to live in the Garden of Eden, the spiritual abode. In other words he achieves membership in the Kingdom of God.²⁴

In Buddhism, the Nirvana is the supreme goal, the '*summum bonum*' of human life. In this state all the miserable conditions are irrevocably extinguished. When Nirvana is achieved, the person feels real inner peace and tranquillity which cannot be expressed in human language. The so-called Nirvana is nothing more than an inner transition from being impure to being pure. It is possible for everyone because the contamination in the mind is not static, but springs up from the prevailing conditions. In the changing circumstances it will get an obstruction to sustain it; the root cause of which is ignorance. There is a vigorous antidote to this which is the wisdom of emptiness

20. F. Antony; Buddhism and Christianity; their inner affinity P 120

21. Dr. Radha Krishnan; Recovery of Faith. P 106

22. Hughes

23. F. Antony; Buddhism and Christianity; their inner affinity. P 120

24. K.N. Tiwari; Comparative Religion. P 144

and when such wisdom develops in the mind, the ignorance automatically collapses. That is why both of them observe the same object and conceive the result in opposite ways. The great logician Dharma Kirti says; "One does not permanently exist, whose cause is the victim of obstruction."²⁵

The term Nirvana consists of two component words i.e. *Nir* and *Vana*. *Nir* is the negative particle and *Vana* means weaving. *Vana* is interpreted as meaning the three poisons which link between the previous and the next life. As a result a person is bound to revolve in the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. The term Nirvana thus makes sense as being the state when a person escapes from the cycle of birth and death, when the afflictions and Karmic forces cease to operate in a proper way.²⁶

Some say the word Nirvana is comprised of two different words, i.e. *Nir* and *Vata*. *Nir* means out and *Vata* stands for wind; and the suffix *Ta* is changed to *Na*. Thus the word Nirvana gives a sense of blowing out or cooling off. The real meaning of Nirvana then becomes to blow out the flames of the three fold poisons i.e. lust, hate and delusion. A sense of the complete extinction of the individual can not be drawn. Dr. Radha Krishnan says; "The word Nirvana literally means blowing out or cooling. Blowing out suggests extinction, cooling suggests not a complete annihilation, but only the dying out of hot passion."²⁷

Hinyana Buddhism believes the *Pari Nirvana* or *Nirupadehsesa* is nothing less than the utter extinction of the beginningless process of aggregates. With the dissolution of the body of the *Arahat*, all feelings and experiences become cool, just as the oil lamp extinguishes itself when the oil is exhausted. Nothing remains as a residue after the passing away of a Buddha or an *Arahat*. No *Arahat* is transformed into a certain purified state when he dies and no half-way house giving shelter is perceived between existence and non-existence. *Nirupadhesesa* means the complete cessation of everything that pertains to the aggregates. Hence this idea is expressed in Udana;

*"The body broke up, perception ceased,
All feelings cooled, all formation stilled,
Consciousness disappeared."*²⁸

25. Dharmakirti; Pramanavartika. Chp.2.

26. Narada Thera; Buddha and His Teaching. P 288

27. Dr. Radha Krishnan; Indian Philosophy. Vol.1 P 447

28. Piyadasi Thera; The Buddha's Ancient Path. P 71

The living being is nothing but a mere conflux of mind and matter. No 'I' self or soul is found among the aggregates which is able to enter Nirvana. In this fluctual process everything undergoes change and nothing remains the same for two consecutive moments. The life process consists of the procession of the co-ordinated energies, e.g. Klesa and Karma. When one achieves Nirvana all the energies completely cease. Satkari Mookerjee says; "The Sautantrikas conception of Nirvana therefore, has nothing to distinguish it from that of the Therevada, as both these schools regard Nirvana not as an annihilation of passion and impurities alone, but of consciousness also. Nirvana is a blank and a void."²⁹

In Mahayana Buddhism, Nirvana is the complete cessation of afflictions.(Klesa) When an Arahata has passed away his contaminated (sasrava) psycho-physical aggregates become utterly extinct and he achieves nerupphisesa Nirvana. This never means he becomes blank at his death as his purified mental continuum survives for ever. H. H. The Dalai Lama says; "But the basic, ultimate, innermost subtle consciousness will always remain. It had no beginning nor will it have to end."³⁰ Moreover the Arahata has to enter the Mahayana system to attain perfect enlightenment. His mind is still tainted with certain subtle defilements which can not be eliminated by practising the Hinyana path. He is compelled to adopt the Bodhisattva's path and yet has not developed great compassion and the Bodhicitta etc. Without the co-ordination of the Bodhicitta, wisdom is defunct and the Arahata is unable to attain Buddhahood. To attain perfect enlightenment he must get unified meditation of wisdom and method.

MEANS TO SALVATION

We find various methods to lead to salvation described in the scriptures. I would like to explain some of those which seem the most important. I have to consider that in order to attain salvation there needs to be two essential factors viz: To remove obstacles and to develop favourable conditions. Keeping these points in mind, I will explain the means to salvation.

In Christianity prayer is an essential path to salvation. The teachings of Christ emphasise the importance of prayer to obtain a living relationship with God. Jesus says; "Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray."³¹ Penance is an effective means to cleanse the soul tainted with

29. Satkari Mukarjee; *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*. P 268

30. Dalai Lama; *The Bodhi Gaya Interview*. P 46

31. The Bible; Matthew, ch.6 vv.8-9.

past faults, and is a necessary one to demonstrate penitence. It is a struggle against evil passions. Adolphe Tanquerey says; "Penance is defined as a supernatural virtue, allied to justice which inclines the sinner to detest his sin because it is an offence against God, and to form the firm resolve of avoiding sin in the future and for atoning for it."³²

Love is the basic lesson of Christianity. Man restores the broken relationship with God and receives grace through genuine love. One should love God as well as fellow beings with all one's heart. The Bible says; "For the whole law is summed up in one commandment: Love your neighbour as you love yourself."³³ To regain the divine nature in man he must purify his soul with atonement bringing him into unique oneness with God. He can then share in the glory and fullness of God's grace and love. The Bible says; "God offered Him, so that by his sacrificial death He should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in Him."³⁴ Nobody can attain salvation without Christ's intervention as man's effort alone is insufficient to restore the broken relationship between man and God. Man can only be saved from sin through Christ's crucifixion. As a substitute Christ suffers for one's sins and brings us to God. Hence the cross becomes the means to create the sinless humanity. The Bible says; "For Christ died for sins once and for all, a good man on behalf of sinners, in order to lead you to God."³⁵ God's grace is essential for salvation because in its absence salvation is impossible. Personal efforts should not be neglected as it is only through both the Grace of God and the individual effort that the seeker is able to realise salvation. The Bible says; "For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it."³⁶

In Buddhism ignorance is the root cause of all the troubles and sufferings. Unless such a nescience is demolished, nobody can achieve the final peace and happiness. A false view of self is an impediment and envelops the essential purity of the mind. The mind has the nature of being empty of an inherent existence and the defilements are only there temporarily. Hence it is said that the mind's nature is clear light. If one develops its antidote, the wisdom, it automatically diminishes and the trainee then hopes to achieve

32. R.S. Shrivastava; *Comparative Religion*. P 140

33. The Bible; Galatians ch.11 v.6.

34. The Bible; Romans ch.3 v.25

35. The Bible; First Epistle of Peter. ch.3 v.18.

36. The Bible; Ephesians ch.2 v.8.

perfect enlightenment. Dharmakirti says;

*"The mind's nature is a clear light,
All the defilements are Adventitious."*³⁷

Ignorance is nothing more than a false notion e.g. 'I am, and this is mine'. It causes many false ideas, i.e. greed, aversion, likes and dislikes and so on. Because of them one fails to see things as they are and they conceal the real nature of things. They make one perceive things with delusion; permanence in impermanence, satisfaction in dissatisfaction, self in non-self, beauty in repulsion etc. Because of these delusions one delights in one's own experiences and rejects feelings of disgust towards them. These types of false views attach one to the five aggregates and cause one to revolve in the cycle of birth and death. Ignorance, which is the main obstruction to liberation, has to be dispelled to enable the evolvment of right understanding. Liberation from the cyclic existence will eventually be achieved if the mind develops right understanding and is detached from taints. Hence Nagarjuna says; "When the notion of an *Atman*, self or soul ceases, the notion of mind also ceases, and one becomes free from the idea of I and Mine."³⁸

We find extensive descriptions of the Buddha-nature in Lankavatara and Utter Tantra. It refers to the innate purity of the mind. Even now we also have Buddha-nature. The purity is the essential calibre of the mind. In exact terms the inner most luminous mind is called the Buddha-nature. No distinction is found between the mind of Buddha and all sentient beings in the Buddha-nature and because of this, all sentient beings can evolve up to Buddha level. The defilements can not penetrate the inner core of the mind and pollute it, it simply shrouds the clarity of the mind. When the fog of the taint subsides, then the Luminous mind emerges in its original form and is called the **Truth body**. Maitreya Nath says;

*"The grace is permeated from Buddha,
The innermost nature of beings are the same,
The sentient beings have the potency to become perfect
Every one is endowed with the essence of Buddha."*³⁹

37. Dharmakirti; Pramanavartika ch.2.

38. Nargarjuna; Madhyamaka Karika; ch.18 v.2.

39. Maitriya Nath; Uttertantra ch.1.

The unified practice of wisdom and method, consisting of altruistic attitude, compassion, Bodhicitta etc., is indispensable to achieve Buddhahood. Under the influence of these methods, Buddha and Bodhisattva evolve to benefit others while expecting no reward. Dharmakirti says; " All the efforts are made for others."⁴⁰.

On the other hand wisdom is a specific component of the **truth body** of Buddha and that is why the major obstruction to attain the **truth body** is the misconception of self which must be first dispelled. The unified practice of method and wisdom is generally held to be the essential path to achieve Buddhahood. Nagarjuna says;

*"Thus these two collections cause
Buddhahood to be attained
So, in brief, always rely
Upon merit and wisdom."*⁴¹

In brief there are similarities between Buddhism and Christianity as both explain the salvation and bondage of sentient beings. However the nature of salvation is explained in different ways; according to Buddhism salvation is not a place, but a state of mind; in Christianity it is a place i.e. the Garden of Eden or Paradise. Both agree that to reach that state the human mind must be purified first.⁴²

40. Dharmakirti; Pramanavartika ch.2

41. Nagarjuna; Precious Garland. ch.3 st.213.

42. While this paper mainly sets out traditional Roman Catholic Christian dogma, numerous points (especially the concept of 'original sin') are at variance with current Protestant doctrine. Ed.

