

Appendix

Buddhism: Diamond Sutra and World Peace

Readers who have attended *Buddhism: Diamond Sutra and World Peace*, the first online course scheduled to be offered in 2018 by the Hong Kong University School of Professional and Continuing Education on Coursera may notice that some of the materials from this book also appear in the above course.

Background

I had the opportunity of discussing religions and world peace with some academia of HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE), an arm of The University of Hong Kong. I explained that I had developed some new ideas surrounding the interpretation of section 7 of *The Diamond Sutra*; and believed that it would be immensely beneficial to promote world peace with such new ideas. Thereupon, members of the HKU SPACE academia expressed interest in the new ideas, an agreement was duly signed for a non-profit joint venture to create an online course. This is how the online course came about.

16 Questions and Answers

Below are the 16 Questions and Answers I have produced with HKU SPACE in preparation for part of the video presentation in the course.

1. What do you expect to bring to students through this course?

The world is in total chaos. Everyone knows it, but it takes deep contemplation to understand the underlying cause of human conflict.

This cause can be analyzed from two different angles: First, we study the hatreds caused by religious divisions. Second, we study the dark side of human nature that fosters discrimination, attachment, and delusion.

We think of religious conflicts such as the crusades as ancient history, yet religious hatred remains, and these conflicts are still relevant today. This course therefore hopes to inform that war or any other form of punitive measures alone cannot possibly put a halt to religious hostility. Rather, we need a framework for peace which is wise, fair and acceptable to all the involved parties.

I have developed this course to offer relevant questions and answers for readers to undertake serious meditation.

2. What has prompted you to carry out the research on “religion and world peace?”

Through contemplating the meaning of life, I have gradually realized that giving away to help others is the primary responsibility of being human. I think it would be a great thing to bring forward a proposal to help resolve the chaotic situations in this world.

Anyone who finds any solution should come out and speak up. It has occurred to me that the Buddhist classic *Diamond*

Sutra talks about a concept that could potentially help promote peace, so I cannot wait to share it.

3. Why do you choose the *Diamond Sutra*? How could it help lead to world peace?

The *Diamond Sutra* addresses the concepts of “Conditioned Phenomena” and “Unconditioned Phenomena.” Most scholars agree when it comes to what “conditioned phenomena” is about. Simply put, anything which has a beginning and an end is conditioned phenomena. However, it is much more difficult to comprehend the concept of unconditioned phenomena.

During my study of religions, I have sensed that both in Christianity and Islam, God is worshipped as an eternal entity, and thus falls into the category of unconditioned phenomena.

Thinking from this perspective, I realize that the *Diamond Sutra* has provided the most ingenious solution for world peace. Section 7 of the sutra states, “All sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity.”

I try to explain this scriptural text from a new angle. Three points are particularly worthy of our attention:

First, the phrase “all sages and highly respected scholars” refers to all the persons of great virtue in Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, and any other spiritual culture.

Second, this scriptural text points out that the differing opinions among sages revolve around unconditioned phenomena, the eternal and permanent state. The God (the Holy Father, Jesus) worshipped in Christianity, Allah, the one and only God in Islam, and Heaven and Hell all belong to the realm of unconditioned phenomena.

Third, I think as long as we understood the grand principle stated in the *Diamond Sutra*, we know that religious disputes are utterly unnecessary. The above mentioned scriptural text, simply-put, denotes that all religions are similar, except that their understanding of eternity is separately and distinctively focused. In other words, discrimination amongst religions is totally avoidable because it is not caused by any deep and implacable hatred.

4. How would you define “religion”?

In this course, we define religion as:

“a philosophy or teaching developed from the belief that the spiritual nature of a person continues to exist after the death of the body and a reward or a punishment is accorded depending on his or her behavior; and through which philosophy or teaching, there are certain guidelines devised for people to follow. ”

5. Why do we need to know the definition of religion?

Because it leads to the understanding that religion itself does not cause hatred.

In the definition of religion, we see that its purpose is to offer people an optimal spiritual sanctuary and entice them

to do good deeds. It never entices people to butcher each other.

Once we understand the definition, we are able to resolve many problems, such as the conflicts and enmities among religions or between religion and science.

6. Why would there be dissension among religions?

We see that every monotheistic religion worships a supreme creator, or simply put “a god”. An undeniable fact is that the existence of the “God” has never been verified by science. If the Christian path to salvation is true, then the Islamic one is false, and vice versa. Consequently, within a rigid faith, believers of a false faith are sent to hell.

A person who absolutely believes in a particular version of salvation would never become true friends with a pagan believer destined for hell. As a result, religious conflicts emerge.

7. How do we categorize the infinite universe?

Everything in the universe can be divided into two categories:

Category one is described as “the transient aspects of matters which, including life, have a beginning and an end.”

Category two is described as “the permanence of eternity”. These, from a Buddhist perspective, are “conditioned phenomena” and “unconditioned phenomena”, respectively, as illustrated in the *Diamond Sutra*.

Section 32 of the *Diamond Sutra* reads: “All conditioned phenomena are just illusions - like bubbles, like shadows, like dew, and lightning. This is the way one should see the conditioned.”

Section 7 of the *Diamond Sutra* states: “All sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity.”

8. How did you come up with this special and interesting concept?

I did not conceive this method of analysing the conditioned and unconditioned, which has existed in Buddhist sutras for a long time.

My own study has found that the traditional interpretation slightly differs from mine; and because my explanation could be used to advance the establishment of world peace, and thus it is very important.

9. What is the significance of this categorization?

The two-tier category of myriad things is significant in that it helps us study controversial issues in a systematic way.

For example, we could study the issues regarding religion and science, recognizing that their subjects belong to two fundamentally different realms, and shall not come into any conflict.

Besides, we could come to realize that unconditioned phenomena are beyond human intelligence. As a result, people would not impose their own interpretation of unconditioned phenomena onto others, because god and the teaching of god which are both eternal, are about faith, not proof. So-called religious freedom is perfectly logical and reasonable.

10. What makes you believe that this categorization can resolve religious conflicts?

“Unconditioned phenomena” are eternal and permanent, and cannot be demonstrated or explained through science.

Because unconditioned phenomena are unverifiable, followers of all religions shall honestly acknowledge that we are on the same road searching for the truth, and shall respect rather than discriminate against each other.

11. What do you think religious believers are pursuing?

- 1) Simply put, they are searching for confirmation of understanding of the truth which they believe.
- 2) Aside from that, they wish for the help of gods and spirits to assist them in overcoming difficulties in their daily lives. They communicate with gods and ask to be blessed by them.

As a result, we could easily see that a Christian going to a church and a Buddhist attending a temple are more or less the same in meaning albeit different in form.

12. Do people from different religious groups share any commonality in the things they pursue?

There are commonalities among them, one of which is to wish for an ideal afterlife.

The existence of religion depends upon the human belief in life-after-death, which is given different names in different religions.

13. Aside from religious conflicts, there are weaknesses in human nature. How does the dark side of humanity affect world peace?

Humans are influenced by craving, aversion, and ignorance, which generate discrimination, attachment and delusion.

If a problem is simply caused by the craving, aversion, and ignorance of humanity without any religious involvement, then the problem can be solved through compromise and negotiation.

In contrast, if a problem involves religious factors, it becomes intractable. Believers do not compromise on God.

Take the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians for example. If the two sides were simply fighting to seize control of land without any religious factors, the problem would have a political solution.

For now, we will have to wait for someone equipped with the wisdom to come up with a solution that satisfies the religious dignity of all concerned.

14. Do you think there is any way to alleviate the conflicts among human beings?

What is needed is an inquisitive mindset to understand the cause of conflicts.

Here I would like to quote a Buddhist verse, that is “to change delusion into awakening, and to escape suffering and attain happiness.”

We should reflect on problems we encounter and find out their origins before reacting, and always be willing to help others.

15. What is the importance of almsgiving?

I think the fundamental meaning of humanity or purpose of life lies in our ability to give away in almsgiving.

Section 4 of the Diamond Sutra says, “when a bodhisattva’s mind is directed to all or any matters, thoughts should be of giving away to help others without any link or attachment to other considerations.”

There are two kinds of almsgiving or giving away to help others: materialistic-donation and dharma-donation.

The *Diamond Sutra* repeatedly enunciates that the merit of materialistic-donation is incomparably greater than that of dharma-donation, a point people often ignore.

Let me give an example to illustrate this point. Assume a certain leader of some state feels that its military power is

so much superior to that of a hostile neighbour that this neighbour can do no harm to his own country in spite of provocation against it, and civil war breaks out in this neighbouring country, causing hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of refugees. If someone at the relevant time counselled the leader against provoking war by expounding the true meaning of the Buddhist scripture, his act of admonition would be a dharma-donation.

To address the significance of almsgiving, or giving away to help others, we ought to understand that the purpose of life, or humanity, is to freely give away our possessions. If we, and ultimately the society we live in, embrace almsgiving as part of our culture, the world would be a far, far better place to live in.

16. In the final analysis of the entire course, do you think that human beings will be able to achieve world peace one day?

Will humans attain total peace some day? It is hard to know. But we all know that some prerequisites exist for this day to come. If these prerequisites appear in time, it is possible for the world to establish lasting peace.

There are two factors in need of consideration:

- 1) The influence of religion in the world.
- 2) The proper ways of dealing with humanity's weaknesses, namely, craving, aversion, and ignorance.

Regarding the first point, people ought to have a correct understanding of religion, especially its purpose.

If we understand the true nature and purpose of religion,

there is no reason why we cannot live harmoniously with people of different religious beliefs.

As to the second point, I think so long as we realize that the purpose of humanity and life is almsgiving, everything could be negotiated and resolved. We need not be too pessimistic.

[For further information about the free online course scheduled to be offered in both English and Chinese, kindly visit: worldpeacehow.com]