

Buddhism as a religion

It seems to me that these days not many people believe in religion. They believe more in science. It can look to them like the beliefs of religion have been disproved or overtaken by science and its humanitarian function by the Welfare State. So is religion redundant?

Of all religions, Buddhism is, perhaps, the one that makes the most claims to be compatible with science, so in some people's eyes at least it escapes dismissal. Like most other religions it also has a sound, benevolent moral basis so it is also humanitarian. Perhaps, therefore, there is not so much to object to, but is there any good reason to pursue it? Many first encounter Buddhism through mindfulness or meditation that are presented as 'Secular Buddhism'. So it might seem that modern society is at least successfully borrowing some Buddhist principles. But what about the religious side of Buddhism, does Buddhism indeed have a religious side?

There is the belief in rebirth. I would not be the first to point out how useful it is to reflect on dependent origination, the Buddhist description as to the mechanisms of rebirth, as it can be observed within our lives. This can give us a deeper understanding of the consequences of a moral or immoral action whether we believe in rebirth or not. In this way perhaps we can transform a system of belief into a philosophy of life.

Then there are all the conventions, institutions and rites and rituals of Buddhism. Although surely open to corruption, in their pure form these give expression to spiritual truths and create a Refuge in Saṅgha, in spiritual community. Here individuals may commit themselves to a level of moral behaviour and spiritual practice far above what is possible without the support of a wider community.

I offer this for your reflection.

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