

## Bát Chánh Đạo

1. Anh Chị nghĩ gì về giá trị của sự cầu nguyện lễ bái trong Phật Giáo khi đem ra so sánh với giáo lý Bát Chánh Đạo?

From a philosophical examination of “cầu nguyện lễ bái”, as generally concerned with religious rituals, several notable considerations emerge in the context of theistic belief systems: (1) rituals establish a link between the believer and the divine to replicate the mythical and spiritual experience, (2) the religious link between the believer and the divine underlies the basis of ego diffusion and subsequent integration into the greater whole beyond the individual, (3) the religious link and the spiritual experience console the believer and provide comfort when confronted with existential dilemmas and more immediate material uncertainties.

The ritual “Cầu nguyện lễ bái”, as concerned with Buddhism practiced as a faith-based doctrine, bears many similarities to traditional theistic traditions. Through this ritual, the Buddhist believer replicates the mythical actions of Buddhist followers during the Buddha’s time to establish a relationship between the mundane and the divine or the deity. Through rituals, the Buddhist believer vicariously experiences the divine, submitting to the awe of the mystical experience of the deity, transcending the boundaries of mundane existence associated with the individual. Without comprehending the nature of the Buddha’s enlightenment or its implications for the believer, the believer associates himself with and partially assumes the characteristics embodied by the Buddha without genuine transformative effort on the part of the believer. Through religion, the Buddhist believer accesses a renowned and time-honored Asian tradition and is provided the means to elevate his ego not only in the metaphysical sense, but also from a sociological and psycho-physiological perspective as well. Lastly, through “Cầu nguyện lễ bái” and the religious link it establishes between the believer and his sense of the divine, the believer projects existential certitudes (e.g. individual significance relative to the Universal whole, preservation of the Self following physical death, moral absolution and recompense, etc.) onto his own uncertain existence. Through this ritual, the Buddhist believer may entreat the divine for material endowment, believing that divine intervention to have greater causal efficacy than his own efforts.

Unlike faith-based doctrines which identify most major religions, Buddhism, as it was founded, relies on transformation of the Self to achieve liberation from dukkha. Other religions posit that mankind’s suffering results from its separation from and rejection of the divine Creator. Because mankind is imperfect, mankind is ignorant and impure. These flaws manifest as evils, which these religions often anthropomorphize into external sentient entities. Ultimately, these religions attribute human suffering to external causes, and salvation occurs through unification with the pure and perfect Creator. Even in Eastern mythologies (such as those present in Chinese and Vietnamese folklore), the human condition is predetermined through an immutable fate, fortune and misfortune result from extrinsic factors beyond human intervention, or a divine mandate governs the fortunes of all humans. Buddhism’s proclivity towards harmony inevitably subjected its views to the influences of these mythologies, and unfortunately, the ritual “Cầu nguyện lễ bái” is degraded from the original Buddhist objective of liberation from dukkha through

internally cultivated wisdom instead into liberation from misfortune through divine external intervention.

The Buddha posits the root cause of human suffering and discontentment to be ignorance. Through ignorance arise greed and aversion. Salvation from suffering and discontentment result when the defilements that plague sentient existence are eliminated. Because the classical triad of ignorance, greed, and aversion are mental phenomena that afflict each individual's consciousness, the Buddha reasoned that each individual's salvation depends solely on that individual's capacity to redress the aforementioned mental phenomena. Unlike other religions and unlike the traditional ritual of "Cầu nguyện lễ bái", in which the individual focuses outward (on an external deity, hope, natural or metaphysical force, etc.), Buddhism provides the Noble Eightfold Path so that the individual can cultivate the moral discipline, the concentration, and the wisdom to penetrate inward to overcome the defilements inside him that doom him to endless suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path reinforces the Buddha's advice to us that we possess the capacity to achieve enlightenment, if only we would diligently practice the Path, for Buddhas can but only point the way.

To conclude, the practice of "Cầu nguyện lễ bái" can, at best, result in the accumulation of merit so that future rebirths will be better but is otherwise insufficient. To completely end the cycle of rebirths and achieve deliverance from all forms of dukkha, one must sincerely practice the Noble Eightfold Path to transform oneself.

2. Anh Chị có nghĩ rằng chúng ta có thể hoán chuyển vị trí của Bát Chánh Đạo mà không cần phải sắp theo vị trí từ 1 đến 8 như truyền thống xưa nay không? Tại sao?

My answer is "yes" and "no": it depends on one's goals and where on the Path one wants to go. Clearly, the objectives of the lay Buddhist are different from those of a Buddhist monk, and even then, the objectives of a Buddhist monk vary with the Buddhist tradition as unique applications of the Vinaya and Abhidhamma are known to exist for each of the different traditions. From a general perspective, it can thusly be said that these differences exist because there are not identical applications of the Noble Eightfold Path amongst them. While all sentient beings possess the same capacity for enlightenment, each individual's development of that capacity is not equal.

Oftentimes, it is not even a question of whether or not we *can* rearrange the elements in the Noble Eightfold Path for reality shows us that Buddhists knowingly and unknowingly, willingly and unwillingly rearrange, truncate, or omit elements of the Noble Eightfold Path in their "practice" of Buddhism. As an example, consider the case of a Buddhist child being raised in a traditional Buddhist family. From an early age, the child is instilled with Buddhist moral discipline. The child may consciously practice Right Speech and Right Action. And while the child may have experienced the physical aspects of dukkha (namely birth and sickness) or suffering associated with aversion, greed, or attachment, the child has not yet developed the insight to fully fathom Right View nor the capacity nor even the necessity to practice the remaining elements of the Path. Certainly, the child can be taught, but the child will lack the insight to intuit the truth of the Teachings. As a result, the remaining elements in the Path

become of questionable pragmatic relevance to the child, and the ordering of the Path would hardly matter.

On the other hand, an adult lay Buddhist may only be concerned with accumulating merit for progressively better rebirths in Samsara. His practice of the elements pertaining to *silakkhandha* may help him cultivate compassion and may contribute to harmonizing society. He may even practice Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, but the fruits of his effort may never yield the penetrative insight associated with complete enlightenment. For example, during his meditative practices, he only achieves *chi*, to arrest his thoughts, but he never goes further to *quán*. As a result, his grasp of Right View will be limited because his investigation of the twelve nidanas of dependent origination lacks depth. Essentially, his development of one element of the Path becomes handicapped because of the lack of development of another element. For example, an inadequate grasp of Right View results in the weak application of Right Effort, which impact Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, which in turn arrests development of Right View. In this case, a causal connection between the Path's elements can be established, but the connections are not necessarily linear or even possess singular alignment (i.e. a causal mesh in which one element impacts multiple elements simultaneously). As a result, assigning a sequence to the eight elements become challenging or even pointless if any degree of circularity exists.

However, in the case of the individual whose goal on the Path is complete enlightenment, the traditional order of the Noble Eightfold Path reveals the careful consideration and the genius psychological insight of the Buddha. For the seeker of enlightenment, the first of the Four Noble Truths is realized as small glimpses into the reality of dukkha underlying all of the five aggregates of existence. These brief realizations form the foundation for Right View. Right View provides the structure that subsequently frames Right Thought: his thoughts, volitions, and perceptions (of all six senses). With Right View, he understands that virtue and wisdom are intertwined, that *silakkhandha* is governed by Right Thought and framed by Right View, and without moral discipline, his progress will stop. Through moral discipline, he establishes an environment conducive to the cultivation of *samadhikkhandha*, an environment free of external karmic pressure, free of bodily distractions, and unsettling mental afflictions. Right Effort provides the spiritual energy for continuation along the Path. His mind achieves the clarity necessary for Right Mindfulness, so that he can observe the coming and passing of phenomena. With Right Concentration, he deeply investigates the factors of dependent origination, to penetrate the root cause of *being*, *of becoming*, and of *passing*. Tracing this causal chain, one sees the categorical logic of the Buddha in assembling the order of *silakkhandha*, *samadhikkhandha*, and *paññakkhandha* is purposeful and hardly arbitrary.

Even within the three groups, one sees a deliberate order. One's views dictate one's consciousness of the world, one's perception, and one's volition. As for *silakkhandha*, Bhikkhu Bodhi in his discussion of the Noble Eightfold Path explains the ascendancy of Right Speech over Right Action in that the capacity for verbal communication in humans can have a tremendous impact on others. For example, while the Buddha possessed telepathic abilities, it was through His application of Right Speech that he transmitted His Teachings to us. Furthermore, in *silakkhandha*, the order of Right Action and Right Livelihood suggests to us the relationship between the two, how one is a superset of the other, and the relative scope (individual and society) between the two.

**Excellent ! You have given very strong arguments to support your thoughts. Grade: 98 / 100**

**PS. I feel that in this paper you quoted some parts of the writing of Wapola Rahula, *What Buddha Taught*, his book on the chapter of “The Four Noble Truths”. If this assuming is true, you must give the footnote at the end of the paper. If you forget to do so, when people read your paper they might think that some arguments in this paper are not your ideas. Then you fall into a category of plagiarism. The grade of the paper will go below 50 / 100**