

Preface

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Although the historicity of the Buddha is universally accepted, there is no unanimity on the exact date. For instance, in Sri Lanka 483 BCE is believed to be the date of his passing away while in Burma 543 BCE is surmised. In Tibet it is conjectured to be 835 BC, while in China, 11th century BCE is an accepted date. The Indian tradition holds on to 1793 or 1807 BCE. Leaving these vagaries aside, for all 400 million Buddhists around the world, the Buddha’s quest finds its origin and beginnings with the story of Siddhartha (someone-who-has-all-his-worldly-wishes-fulfilled). His circumstances bear resemblance with those of many third millennium working citizens who dwell comfortably in relative material luxury. The person referred to here, Gautama, who lived in utmost refinement roughly 100 generations ago in the iron age, when the globe was considered flat, is also someone who might be considered as the most victorious (*tama*) on earth (*gau*). His family name Shakya (kindness) hints at another sublime quality which the historical “awakened one” (the Buddha) must have had. The subject of this book is not per se the person of Shakyamuni – a moniker pointing at kindness in charitable stillness (*muni*) – but the psychological content of his teachings, referred to as the Dharma (Sanskrit) or the Dhamma (Pali). While Sanskrit is the high-brow language of the upper classes in Jambudvīpa (ancient India), Pali is a language that is close to Magadhi, a dialect the Buddha had most probably spoken. This exemplifies that the Dharma can be taught in any language as long as the message of Siddhartha Gautama the Buddha reaches the people’s hearts. The language proposed here is that of social constructionist psychology.

The Dhamma refers to the Buddha’s “Middle Way”, a way that not only keeps the middle ground between self-mortification and self-indulgence, but also denotes the middle ground between eternalism and nihilism. The Buddha proposed instead the negation of the existence of an eternal god (theism) as well as the negation of the non-existence of a god (atheism), thus leaving one in a meditative “emptiness” of non-theism to be filled with kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, relational qualities to be practiced daily. The Buddha did not claim to be a prophet or assign people to worship. Despite promoting emptiness instead of dogma, he is often classified on the same list with Abrahamic figures like Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed. In my humble opinion the Buddha does not belong to this illustrious company of believers. At bottom the Dharma, a reaction to polytheistic Brahmanism, considers any god concept – even if upgraded to “the-one-and-only” – as a delusion. Phenotypical similarities mask genotypical differences. Vodka and water look the same, until you taste them. The Dharma is not a sky-god religion but a social construction on the move, ever changing going forward.

To be a traveler on the Buddhist path without a god to talk to is lonely indeed. Unlike a

loneliness of the desert where sun-strokes and *fata morganas* are rampant and a consequent flight into god delusions is likely, the Buddha did not take refuge in the fantasy of heavenly holy cows. On the contrary, he totally faced and radically stayed in the self-imposed utmost adverse and devastating lonely condition until he found the key to end existential suffering (Duhkha) in order to benefit all fellow human beings. This key, which is of a nondual nature, is ineffable much like the concept of zero (empty) was for the ancient Greek mathematicians who hence allocated the “missing nothing” to the realm of the sacrosanct. We unfortunately lack a linguistic foundation for understanding this key, therefore the many words for the psychological reset point of null in this book and the overall emphasis on meditation practice. Thus, for the Buddha’s students it was/is a lonely journey too, if admonished – like in the case of radical fellow travelers of the Chan/Zen denomination – to kill the Buddha (nothing but a mere image or proverbial concept since he is already dead) whenever one meets him on the road. Other masters advised to urinate on Buddha statues or to clean one’s arse with Buddhist scriptures to emphasize that the Dharma is not about abstractions and concepts but about daily experiential practice to improve oneself and mankind. What does such iconoclastic advice imply? How can the Buddha’s causality hypothesis of Dependent Origination (the non-independent arising, peaking, subsiding, and ceasing of all that is perceivable) make the refuge and clinging to some god redundant and unnecessary? Does the Dharma as a contemporary psychology exclude the Dharma as a religion or philosophy? What is the meaning of life? Where do we come from and go to? Is there life after death? What is the difference between rebirth and reincarnation? These and other tantalizing questions necessitate a grand quest. This book explores the Buddhist radical deconstruction toward a “non-foundational emptiness” and invites practitioners to collaborate in the Buddhist reconstruction of the world in terms of the postmodern psychology of Social Construction. Whether we have succeeded in this challenging task is up to you, the reader, to judge.

Before starting, here is a guideline to read this book. It is recommended to begin reading the first chapter which functions as a torch. This chapter lays the foundations for a New Buddhist Psychology with cross references to all other chapters of this anthology. Each of the chapters is a deepening of the various topics raised in the leading chapter. To make this work accessible for a large audience from various disciplines of scholarship, the use of Sanskrit and Pali is kept to a minimum. But several terms are advertently kept in Pali or Sanskrit to avoid ambiguity and to augment authenticity. Sanskrit terms refer to Mahayana scriptures, while Pali terms refer to Theravada scriptures. Please note that the Sanskrit term Dharma is applied throughout to denote the entire body of the Buddhist teachings, including the Theravada, Vajrayana, and Tantrayana teachings. The context will leave no doubt to which meaning the term Dharma refers. However, the Pali term Dhamma will solely denote the Theravada scriptures. With regards to the various discourses of the Buddha (*Nikayas*) as the source of *suttas* (Pali) and *sutras* (Sanskrit), each chapter makes use of its own abbreviations. All abbreviations are used only if previously written in full once. The specific way to refer to a particular discourse by each author is left untouched in the editing. Respecting each author’s scholarly background, referencing habits are left intact. Thus, some refer to a list of titles (gathered at the end of the book), others use notes to refer, and still others apply a combination of notes and references. Finally, while the British spelling is given priority, the American authors’ spelling is left intact.

On behalf of my fellow travelers who embarked with me on this “New Horizons” endeavor – the late Padmal de Silva, Ruth Naylor, Asanga Tilakaratne, Ven. Soorakkulame

Pemarathana, Marja Kwee-Taams, Ven. Guang Xing, Paul van der Velde, David Kalupahana, Pahalawattage Premasiri, Tilak Kariyawasam, Yakupiyage Karunadasa, Zhihua Yao, Bill Mikulas, Paul Fleischman, Padmasiri de Silva, Ven. Sik Hin Hung, Aung Myint, Lobsang Rapgay, James Austin, Yutaka Haruki, and Kenneth Gergen – I wish the reader an illuminating reading venture in *kalyana mittata* (ennobling friendship). Maurits G.T. Kwee, editor