

Buddhism As A Religion – Part 2

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Evolution of Religion - by Ven Dr M. Punjabi Maha Thera

EVOLUTION OF RELIGION

- Religion is the way humans deal with the problem of existence;
- The problem of existence is that while all beings struggle for existence, the environment is constantly changing in various ways that prevent the struggle to succeed;
- As lower forms of animals adapt or fall victim to the laws of natural selection, humans too are forced to adapt;
- Humans deal with this problem by seeking power to control the environment instead.

WEAKNESS MAKES HUMANS SEEK POWER

- The newborn human infant is the weakest of all animal species – unable to even get up and walk in the first year after birth, and unable to seek food or shelter on its own for several years before adulthood;
- While the human child, when faced with difficulties, runs to the mother or father for help, the adult human has no one to run to for help;
- Primitive man, out of ignorance and fear of the unknown, escapes from reality and turns to fantasy as a convenient solution by seeking help from imaginary supernatural beings.

HOW HUMANS SEEK POWER

- Earliest form of seeking power is through magic;
- Magic is the effort to control supernatural powers through human powers – like chantings, magical rituals and ceremonies;
- This form of magic is still practiced amongst primitive cultures today, commonly known as “**Shamanism**”.

THE HUMILITY OF HUMANITY

- Realizing that natural forces do not submit to human “magical” powers, humans begin to humble themselves;
- Humans humble themselves to supernatural powers through worship and glorification of the supernatural, human sacrifices, self-discipline in appeasing the supernatural powers, and various forms of submission;
- Through such efforts, humans begin to adapt themselves to fit into the environment;
- This way, religion turned into an evolutionary process;

BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

- As ancient human species survive natural selection by evolving a larger and more advanced brain, he begins to discover the power of cognition and intellect;
- In further developing this newfound cognitive capability into rational and critical thinking, the modern human discovers and recognizes the realities of the conditionality of occurrences, which is called “**determinism**”;
- All natural occurrences are determined by the presence of the necessary conditions;
- Instead of praying to supernatural beings, he learns to manipulate the laws of determinism to control his environment with the power of his intellect and creativity;
- This is **science**.

THE THREAT OF SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS

- With greater scientific discoveries, humans begin to destroy the environment and threaten civilization with modern technologies that consume natural resources in greater and faster ways than ever before;
- Over-population, economic disparities, uneven food distribution, terrorism, crime rates, greed for monetary and political power, threat of nuclear war, and countless emerging trends in the modern age destroy the quality of life and threaten the preservation of humanity;
- Man's attempt to control the environment has turned into an out-of-control environment;

A FURTHER STEP IN EVOLUTION

- Science has not solved the problem of struggling for existence, instead, it has led to increasingly greater levels of fear and anxiety in the human mind;
- A paradigm shift is needed to solve the problem;
- All this means the mind of man needs to evolve, not in a scientific way, but in a psychological way;
- Hence, biological evolution of the human species must now be followed by psychological evolution.

EVOLUTION OF THE MIND

- The mind will not evolve unconsciously;
- While biological evolution occurs unconsciously through the laws of environmental determinism, psychological evolution can only occur through conscious intention and effort;
- The mind must be made to evolve consciously;
- To make the mind evolve, the same laws of determinism must be applied, but this time it is psychic determinism;
- We must consciously provide the conditions necessary for the mind to evolve.

UNDERSTANDING THE MIND

- Mind is an activity, not an entity.
- It arises out of the collective electro-chemical activities of neuron cells in the central nervous system of the organism – but perceived subjectively, therefore mind is a subjective experience;
- It is the reaction of the organism to environmental stimulation;
- This reaction is a chain reaction consisting of:
 - perception, cognition, affection, intention, action, consequence.

EVOLUTION OF MENTAL PROCESSES

- The affective process develops before the cognitive process in the course of human biological evolution;
- It reacts faster to stimulations from the environment and has the power of instantaneous unconscious reaction;
- The cognitive process develops later;
- It can think rationally and become aware of realities of the environment, but is slower to respond to stimulus;

AFFECTIVE PROCESS DOMINATES

- The affective process dominates because of its faster reaction time, and if unchecked by the cognitive process, the affective process dominates over all our behaviour;
- This is the behaviour of lower animals, and this is the reason for all the troubles in our experiences;
- Therefore a way must be found to control the affective process.

THE WAY OF THE BUDDHA

- Modern psychology is attempting to find a way, but without any success;
- Only the Buddha found the way;
- The way is the **Sublime Eightfold Way**.