

## The Covenant of the Buddha

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When someone comes along and shows you what has been true all along, but you hadn't noticed it, that's a revelation. Like the great discoveries of science, a spiritual Revelation connects all the loose contradictions and causes one to see further than ever before the unity of the truth. Among the key tenets of the Bahá'í Revelation is one that explains the long-pondered mystery of the relationship between the various religions of the world. The Bahá'í Writings note that all religions have been looking for a Promised One, that all religions are tied together through a great promise, a covenant written in their prophecies - each of the Great Teachers having been predicted by the former Teacher and each One predicting the Next. In the words of the Báb:

*The Lord of the universe hath never raised up a Prophet nor hath He sent down a Book unless He hath established His covenant with all men, calling for their acceptance of the next Revelation and of the next Book. (SB, 87)*

In addition to this tie between successive divine Educators, the Báb pointed out that a separate covenant exists pointing to a great Universal Teacher who would bring together the entire world and all faiths and bring about a great spiritual kingdom on earth. Again, in the words of the Báb, "*With each and every Prophet whom We have sent down in the past We have established a separate Covenant concerning the Remembrance of God and His Day.*" (SB, 68)

Scanning the Writings of the Báb for the meaning of the term "Remembrance of God" one finds comments that are remarkably similar to those in Buddhist texts concerning the "Eternal Buddha" in regard to His divine station, nature of His appearance in this world and beneficial results of recognizing and following Him. This would make an interesting study in and of itself. Let it suffice us at the moment, however, to note that though the sacred texts of each of the world's great religions use different terms, and one can get lost in the myriad of images and superlative references, by investigating their basic definitions and explanations it can be seen that they are often merely using differing terms and images to describe the same thing.

Consider a mundane example: Imagine that several strangers were sitting in a waiting room and one said, "I'm waiting for Dr. Suzuki." Another said, "I'm expecting Toshio at any moment." A young woman queried, "I wonder when my father is coming." Still another person might have said, "I'm here for an appointment with the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Japan." If these people didn't know better, imagine how surprised they would be when one man entered the room and fulfilled all of their expectations. For the father of the young woman was indeed, Dr. Toshio Suzuki, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, a man of many titles and many talents, related slightly differently to each of these people, but one and the same person.

It is this sort of process that the Bahá'í Writings suggest is at the heart of the unity of religions: We are all waiting for the same Promised One. So the followers of various religions, rather than being guardians of unchanging traditional organizations, are in reality called upon to be aware of the coming of a succeeding divine Messenger who they are enjoined to recognize, accept and follow. Religions, rather than being narrow and rigid, are meant to grow into ever-widening circles of unity.

A point such as this is often dismissed hastily by those who believe in the particular final

efficacy of their own religious traditions, or by those who have given up hope of finding any sense in the myriad of contending religious forms. However, it is relatively simple to go to the scriptural sources of the Founders of the world's major religions and read for oneself to see whether there is truth in this point. Indeed, if the people of the world would examine and become satisfied on this point from their own investigation, there would remain no reason at all for us not to adopt one common faith as the basis for our unity. Is it possible that our separate historical roads have led us to this common momentous starting point for the future of mankind?

In the West there are already many who have reviewed the Bible and found the comparisons between its teaching and Bahá'u'lláh's life and teaching to be stimulating, challenging and convincing. Those of Jewish background are able to accept Bahá'u'lláh as the Lord of Hosts. Many Christians have accepted Him as the Return of Christ. In the East, Mr. Jamshed Fozdar has published in India a large volume bringing together many Buddhist prophecies titled, The Buddha Maitreya-Amitabha has Appeared. However, most of his sources are not available to the average Buddhist in Japan and until now no such approach has been taken to the scriptures of Buddhism in general use in this country.

When our family came to Japan, I was eager to look into the locally available Buddhist scriptures for such evidence, and found a copy of the book The Teaching of Buddha in the hotel room where we stayed the evening we arrived. This book is put out by the Buddhist Promoting Foundation (Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai), and must be regarded as somewhat like The Gideon Bible of Japan. This book claims to gather together the essence of over 5000 volumes of Buddhist scripture. It must be noted that even as Christians do not always agree on what is an authoritative translation or interpretation of the Holy Bible, not all Buddhists agree on what constitutes authoritative or authenticated scripture. There are Pure Land Buddhists and Nichiren Buddhists and many other varieties who favor one aspect or another of the teachings. But setting aside the various arguments about these past springs of divine wisdom (the sutras) that certainly have been mixed over time with the run-off of centuries of interpretations, interpolations and extractions, it seems reasonable that there still must be some of the essence of their origin in them that they continue to be considered illuminating to at least a fair number of people. `Abdu'l-Bahá has said of the Buddhist scriptures,

*There are prophecies concerning this Manifestation in the Buddhist books, but they are in symbols and metaphors, and some spiritual conditions are mentioned therein, but the leaders of religion do not understand. They think these prophecies are material things; yet those signs are foreshadowing spiritual occurrence. (JWTA, 27)*

Even though "in symbols and metaphors", curiosity leads one to wonder what these prophecies might be. Some scholars may have the patience and resources to search far afield for esoteric sources. But if faith is for the everyman, what sources are close at hand that may be shared with someone who might want to investigate this point on their own?

Though this writer's search through Buddhist literature in Japan is a cursory one at best, I have yet to discover a text as readable and clear and to the point as The Teaching of Buddha. It is available here through any bookstore and widely distributed outside Japan as well. Its drawback, though, is that the Japanese translation is so simplified that some of its important nuances seem to have been lost in the Japanese version.

This text, however, clearly distinguishes between Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism, and the Eternal or Glorified Buddha who appears in the world from time to time. The Buddha is compared to the appearance of the moon in its differing phases.

In a short chapter on "The Appearance of Buddha" is an entire section on how a Buddha may be recognized. To quote:

It is seldom that a Buddha appears in the world. When a Buddha does appear, He attains Enlightenment, introduces the Dharma, severs the net of suspicion, removes the lure of desire at its root, plugs the fountain of evil; completely unhindered, He walks at will over the world. There is nothing greater than to revere the Buddha. (B, 56)

This paper will not begin to adequately compare these prophecies and explanations to the life and Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Those of you who are familiar with Bahá'u'lláh may recognize the connections immediately. Those who would like to become more knowledgeable may wish to explore the Bahá'í Writings more directly, and as a start, a small volume that summarizes the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh recently made available throughout the world and here in Japan is recommended. To stimulate interest in the question of whether Bahá'u'lláh is the Promised Buddha, notes on this first section might help set a context for a further search. On the fact of the Enlightenment of Bahá'u'lláh, let His own words attest to His experience. To the Shah of Persia in the 1860s He wrote,

*O king! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One who is Almighty and All-Knowing. (PB, 57)*

Having attained this Enlightenment, a Buddha "introduces the Dharma", which means the divine Law, or the "Word of God" as it is referred to in the Bible. Continuing from the above passage Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "*And He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow.*" (ibid)

The Teaching of Buddha comments, "His only purpose is to spread the Dharma and bless all people with its Truth." It is very difficult to introduce the Dharma into a world filled with injustice and false standards, a world that is vainly struggling with insatiable desires and discomforts. Buddha faces these difficulties because of His great love and compassion." (B, 56) Bahá'u'lláh has written of His experience,

*The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner ...that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy and be filled with gladness. This is the Mercy of your Lord, the Compassionate, the most Merciful. (G, 99)*

Severing "the net of suspicion", removing "the lure of desire" and plugging "the fountain of evil" may refer to the process by which people are gradually led to cut through their doubts and become followers, and by following the teachings become transformed spiritually to the point that their material desires and motivations no longer rule their conduct.

The Buddha's effect on his followers is also one of His signs:

Like a calf which enjoys its life with its mother, those who have heard the Buddha's teachings are afterward unwilling to leave Him because His teachings bring them happiness. (B, 58)

One is reminded of the history of those scholars, artists and others who chose imprisonment and banishment to be with Bahá'u'lláh rather than return to their positions of worldly security. The comment that Buddha "walks un hindered over the world" is interesting. It obviously is not literally true; neither Shakyamuni, nor any other Manifestation has done this to historical knowledge. However, spiritually they exhibit supernatural powers that spread their teachings by both material and mysterious processes across the globe. In addition, this may allude to the quality of demonstrating the powers of awareness that reach beyond normal physical confines. Mr. Taherzadeh's books The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh are full of examples of this in relation to the Blessed Beauty.

There is a further list of qualities of the Buddha that could be applied by anyone wishing to verify the claims of any spiritual leader:

Buddha receives the respect of the world because of five virtues: Superior conduct; superior point of view; perfect wisdom; superior preaching ability; and the power to lead people to the practice of His teaching.  
 . . . eight other virtues enable Buddha to bestow blessings and happiness upon the people: to bring immediate benefits in the world though the practice of His teachings, to judge correctly between good and bad, right and wrong, to lead people to Enlightenment by teaching the right way, to lead all people by an equal way, to avoid pride and boasting, to do what He has spoken, to say what He has done, and thus to fulfill the vows of His compassionate heart. (B, 62)

One of the most remarkable things about this list is that it is so rational. Buddhism has been viewed as a highly intuitional approach to the truth. But what is listed here is an objective observer's dream: a clearly written checklist of qualities to look for if one wants to verify whether a spiritual teacher falls into the category of a "Buddha". The conclusion is most simple: "A body may be thought of as a receptacle and if this receptacle is filled with Enlightenment, it may be called the Buddha." (B, 60)

Other fascinating symbolic references of the Universal Buddha can be found in the Threefold Lotus Sutra, another fairly widely known source of Buddhist sutra that is available in Japan. For those who wish to do a more detailed study of the various ways in which this World-honored One is described and the signs of His appearance, going through this book is something like exploring a rich man's attic. There are a lot of interesting images whose connection is not always readily apparent. But there are also some that are solid and clear and relevant. The glossary has a particularly interesting set of lists on the qualities of the Buddha.

Buddhism goes back historically more than 2500 years. The Buddhist sutras did not begin to be recorded for some time after the life the Shakyamuni Buddha and have been scattered far and wide through various divisions and sects, added to, subtracted from, multiplied and divided. It is easy to see why even scholars find it difficult to sum them up in one interpretation.

However, when one looks into scriptures fundamentally accepted by Buddhists of one sect or another, one will find references to a Promised One (known by one name or another) and an injunction on the followers to identify and follow Him. There is good reason, then, for a true follower of Buddhism to be interested in the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and His claim to be the Promised One of all religions. The Teaching Of Buddha summarizes,

So all people should listen to the Buddha's teaching and should follow it even if it seems to lead them again through the flames that envelop this world of life and death. (B, 210)

This is the covenant according to The Teaching Of Buddha.

To close, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh, "The Tablet is ended, but the theme is unexhausted." (TB, 119)

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#### References

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