

Papers from the Panel Discussion on Buddhism and the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í and Buddhism

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When observing and pondering upon the various social, moral, and economic problems besetting Japan today, as so pervasively seen/reported in the media, one feels – even with visceral anguish – the desperate spiritual needs of our country and of its citizenry. Effective solutions to our own and to our countrymen's manifold problems, as premised by this paper, can be found within the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, even though it happens to be not well known yet in Japan.

The origin of Buddhism was in Karpila, Nepal, some 2500 years ago. From that moment onward, Buddhism became trusted and revered. It was deeply believed and widely followed throughout all of Asia. It is said that today 20% of the world population adheres to Buddhism. The calm, peaceful way of life engendered by Buddhism has affected the lives of millions of people. It was 1400 years ago, in the year 594 AD, that Prince Shotoku, under Empress Suiko, introduced Buddhism to Japan. From that moment onward, Buddhism took firm root in Japan and became a reliable center of spiritual guidance for the Japanese people.

Like Buddhism, Bahá'í, too, is a world religion, though it started much later, at the mid-point of the 19th century when humanity was ready to advance into a global community—a community characterized by diversified talents working together in harmony and cooperation. The Bahá'í movement was founded 162 years ago by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh in the Persian cities of Shíráz and Núr. Since its founding in 1844, the Bahá'í Faith has spread to over 210 countries and has established administrative centers in 180 nations. Its teachings are universal in both appeal and application and its central mission is the salvation of the entire planet and the unity of all the peoples of the world through its broadly refreshed spiritual teachings, combined with its unique social teachings, which are not found in any other religion. Today, I would like to humbly present to you what I have observed in comparing these two religions.

Buddhism was not specifically mentioned in the holy writings of the Twin Manifestations, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Commenting on this omission, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith explained the reason is that there had been no followers of Bahá'u'lláh during His Ministry who had a Buddhist origin.

Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, taught that Buddha was a Manifestation of God just like Christ and Mohammad, and that Bahá'u'lláh fulfilled prophecies made by the Buddha. On this panel, I wish to present the central teachings and the prophecies of Buddha and of Bahá'u'lláh, and to explain some of the similarities and differences between them. The similarities will include such characteristics as their common status as Divine Educator, the universality of their teachings, the concept of God, and views on life after death. The differences will focus on such issues as reincarnation, variations in the presentation of their “Golden Rules,” the special singularity of their missions, and the differing population among the adherents of each Faith.

The conclusion will discuss how close these two religions are and how the Bahá'í Faith might be able to revive and give new life to Buddhism and provide a new wellspring of spiritual life for Japan's future social blooming and steadfast international participation.