ABSTRACT: This article suggests that the popular western image of the Buddha of the Pali sutta has been influenced by the opening pages of Walpola Rahula’s book *What the Buddha Taught*. It examines two closely linked qualities postulated by Rahula as attributes of the Buddha: that he is respectful of other religions and that he encourages freedom of thought in his followers. It finds Rahula’s evidence faulty at every turn and goes on to give examples of the Buddha’s and sutta’s disrespectful attitude to other faiths, suggesting that in respect of its ‘exclusivism’, the Buddhism of the Pali sutta is no different from other religions.

INTRODUCTION

Walpola Rahula’s book *What the Buddha Taught* is held in general respect by Buddhist scholars and has been read by many practising Buddhists; far more, I think, than have looked in any detail at the Pali sutta, of which it forms an appreciation. It may well be, at least in part, owing to the influence of the opening pages of Rahula’s first chapter that western Buddhists have adopted an image of the Pali Buddha as a totem of western liberalism.

Anyone who has read the sutta may have a problem recognizing the Buddha-figure that has emerged within this process post-Rahula. For instance:

The Heart Essence course is an introduction to the heart of the Buddhist teachings, using the traditional form of the Four Noble Truths. These four truths were the first teachings given by the Buddha himself... The first truth tells us to be open to everything that we experience. The only way to understand is to experience whatever arises as completely and openly as possible.1

What Buddha is this? What tradition? Which First Noble Truth? How could the writer present such a misleading formulation?

Such specific falsification may be comparatively rare, but the kind of Buddha-image underlying it is not. It has become an accepted element within the ‘new

---

1. From a pamphlet publicizing the Longchen Foundation’s ‘Heart Essence Course’ for 2000, possibly written by the course’s Dharma Director, Rigdzin Shikpo (formerly Michael Hookham).
Dhamma’. In the opening pages of two books which proclaim this new Buddhism, both written by writers familiar with Pali literature, a Buddha authority is evoked to sanction an open life-style that is called ‘Buddhism’. Joseph Goldstein writes:

We are living in remarkable times. A genuine Western Buddhism is now taking birth. Its defining characteristic is ... a simple pragmatism that harkens back to the Buddha himself, who pointedly questioned the established tenets of ancient Indian thoughts. It is an allegiance to a very simple question: ‘What works?’ (Goldstein 2001, 1)

It is of course true that the Buddha challenged the traditional religious concepts of his time, but how is this to be seen as evidence of his promoting a life of open and variegated experimentation? Goldstein seems to be implying that the Buddha encouraged his followers to live continually asking, ‘What works?’, rather than providing them with a defined Dhamma and Discipline which, while it allowed for variations in modes of practice, was founded on an absolute Buddha-knowledge of what does work.

Stephen Batchelor, in his ‘Contemporary Guide to Awakening’ (subtitle for his Buddhism Without Beliefs), suggests something similar when he uses as epigraph a Buddha statement from the suttas and provides his own title for it:

GROUND
Do not be satisfied with hearsay or with tradition or with legendary lore or with what has come down in scriptures or with conjecture or with logical inference or with weighing evidence or with liking for a view after pondering over it or with someone else’s ability or with the thought ‘The monk is our teacher’. When you know for yourselves: ‘These things are wholesome, blameless, commended by the wise, and being adopted and put into effect they lead to welfare and happiness’, then you should practice and abide in them. (Batchelor 1997, 1)

One ‘ground’ or ‘justification’ for Batchelor’s associating an open lifestyle with Buddhism appears to be what he sees as the Buddha’s encouragement of anti-authoritarian feeling and an insistence that people should decide for ‘themselves’ what is beneficial rather than follow an accepted, Buddha-approved programme of training.

Without a poll of Buddhists’ reading habits, perhaps even with it, it is not possible to prove that these evocations of a liberal Buddha stem from Rahula. It is just about conceivable that neither Goldstein nor Batchelor has read What the Buddha Taught. It may be a mere coincidence that Batchelor’s epigraph is also a salient piece of evidence in Rahula’s opening chapter. What is clear is that Rahula presents a detailed and persuasive argument for the existence within the suttas of the kind of Buddha acceptable to ‘new Dhamma’ followers.

Rahula’s Buddha represents a fidelity to two ideas: ‘freedom of thought’ (Rahula 1974, 2, 4) and ‘tolerance’ (p.4) of beliefs and practice other than one’s own. The two ideas are so closely interconnected that evidence for one is frequently cited.
as evidence for the other as well. Here, for the sake of structural clarity, I deal with them separately.

‘FREEDOM OF THOUGHT’

Freedom of thought is postulated by Rahula as encouraged by the Buddha in connection with both the practice of established bhikkhus and the experience of people when they first approach the Dhamma. He says that the Buddha ‘allows freedom to his disciples’ (Rahula 1974, 2) and that he ‘taught, encouraged and stimulated each person to develop himself and to work out his own emancipation’ (p. 1). His evidence involves three sources. Firstly, he refers (p. 1) to the Buddha’s exhortation in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta that his disciples should ‘be a refuge to themselves’: ‘Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge …’ (DN II 101). Taken out of context, these words may give the impression of a teacher committed to the promotion of independent individualized thought, but Gotama is speaking in connection with his own old age and in response to Ānanda’s confusion at the thought of the Buddha’s death. His insistence is on independence from himself – his followers should not need him – not on independence in the sense of pursuing their own life-styles or emancipations. His very next words show what they should depend on: ‘with the Dhamma as your refuge with no other refuge’. They should be independent within and because of the Dhamma, which does not depend on Gotama’s own existence but which is the Dhamma that he discovered.

Rahula’s second source of evidence for the Buddha’s supposed programme of free thought is the same sutta as that from which Batchelor takes his epigraph, the Kesaputta Sutta (often also known as the Kālāma Sutta; AN I 188–93). This, Rahula implies, shows ‘a freedom of thought … unheard of elsewhere in the history of religions’ (Rahula 1974, 3). The inhabitants of Kesaputta, called Kālāmas, tell the Buddha that they are confused by the variety of samānas and brahmīns who have approached them, each insisting that his was the only true doctrine. Rahula’s translation of the Buddha’s reply is not significantly different from Batchelor’s:

Yes, Kālāmas, it is proper that you should have doubt, that you have perplexity, for a doubt has arisen in a matter which is doubtful. Now, look you Kālāmas, do not be led by reports, or traditions, or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances, nor by the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea: ‘this is my teacher’. But, O Kālāmas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (akusala), and wrong, and bad, then give them up ... and when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (kusala) and good, then accept them and follow them.

(Rahula 1974, 2–3)
Rahula, however, like Batchelor, ignores what follows. Gotama’s apparent confidence in the judgement of lay people develops into a suggestion that the Kālāmas should bear in mind the three qualities of greed, hate and delusion when assessing a would-be teacher, the same three qualities the absence of which is in the suttas often noted as an attribute of Buddha and successful Buddha disciple. After considering the freedom from these qualities in terms of the ‘profit and happiness (hitāya sukhāya)’ (AN I 191) which it produces, the Buddha says specifically that the Kālāmas should follow an ‘Ariyan disciple’, a common sutta term for a Buddha follower, one who is ‘freed from coveting and malevolence’ (AN I 192). His apparently liberal advice has turned into an endorsement of his own Dhamma. And of course the Kālāmas become his lay followers.2

A third Rahula source becomes evident when he writes, ‘The Buddha ... told the bhikkhus that a disciple should examine even the Tathāgata (Buddha) himself’ (Rahula 1974, 3). In this case the relevant sutta is the Vīmaṃsaka, ‘The Inquirer’ (MN I 317–20), in which Gotama does welcome investigation into his own attributes, but the sutta takes it for granted that any such inquiry will lead to a ‘faith’ in the Buddha ‘invincible by any recluse or brahmin or god or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world’ (MN I 320). In the suttas, it is unthinkable that there could be any other result. The process of inquiry which Rahula associates with ‘freedom of thought’ is described by the Buddha when he advises as to how a monk should reply if he is asked why he has confidence in the Buddha. The monk thus questioned should say:

Here, friends, I approached the Blessed One in order to hear the Dhamma. The Blessed One taught me the Dhamma with its higher and higher levels, with it more and more sublime levels, with its dark and bright counterparts. As the Blessed One taught the Dhamma to me in this way, through direct knowledge of a certain teaching (ekaccam dhammam) here in that Dhamma, I came to a conclusion about the teachings. I placed confidence (pasādīṃ) in the Teacher thus: ‘The Blessed One is fully enlightened, the Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, the Sangha is practising the right way’. (MN I 320)

Inquiry leads to ‘direct knowledge’ of one aspect of the teaching, and this leads not to preserving open-mindedness regarding other aspects of it but to acceptance of all of it, acceptance based not on thought but on absolute ‘confidence’ in the Buddha as ‘fully enlightened’ and the Saṅgha as practising ‘the right way’ (supatīpanna). If there is thought involved it is not so much free as one-directional. The inquirer entertains no doubt whatever about any aspect of the Dhamma.

2. A not dissimilar movement emerges at AN I 160–62. The Buddha denies saying that alms should be given to no sect other than his own, but this suggestion of tolerance is followed by the remark that some good karma may be gained even from throwing dishwater into a cesspool and then by his insistence that the greatest merit is to be gained from gifts to people who are without the five hindrances, and have five qualities of an asekha, i.e. an Arahant under in his own Dhamma.
These are the sources on which Rahula bases his claim for ‘freedom of thought’, but there is another sequence which seems at first sight to provide better evidence than any of them for the Buddha’s promoting of individualized Dhammas. In an antiphonal structure often found in the suttas, the Buddha questions bhikkhus, and bhikkhus make response en bloc in an incantatory manner as if questions and answers are known beforehand to both questioner and answerers (numbers added):

[1] ‘Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing in this way, would you speak thus: “The Teacher is respected by us, we speak as we do out of respect for the Teacher”? ‘No, venerable sir’.

[2] ‘Knowing and seeing in this way, would you speak thus: “The Recluse says this, and so do (other) recluses, but we do not speak thus”? ‘No, venerable sir’.

[3] ‘Knowing and seeing in this way, would you acknowledge another teacher?’ ‘No, venerable sir’.

[4] ‘Knowing and seeing in this way, would you return to the observances, tumultuous debates, and auspicious signs of ordinary recluses and Brahmins, taking them as the core (of the holy life)?’ ‘No, venerable sir’.

[5] ‘Do you speak only of what you have known, seen, and understood for yourselves?’ ‘Yes, venerable sir’.

[6] ‘Good, bhikkhus. So you have been guided by me with this Dhamma, which is visible here and now, immediately effective, inviting inspection, onward leading, to be experienced by the wise for themselves’. (MN I 265)

This kind of structure, whether or not it was employed to facilitate oral transmission, is not suggestive of ‘free thought’, but the Buddha’s questions in themselves do suggest the promotion of something like it. As with his advice to the Kālāmas and in contrast to the Viṃamsaka Sutta (MN I 317–20), by implication Gotama, in his first question, dismisses as irrelevant the educational motive of ‘respect for the teacher’, though his third question may perhaps vitiate the impact of the dismissal.

What appears more strikingly liberal is the implication behind his fourth and fifth questions: that personal experiencing is what is important as against the mere following of ‘observations, tumultuous debates, and auspicious signs’ associated with other teachers. The same emphasis is continued in his final statement – ‘to be experienced ... for themselves’. As Rahula himself points out, the Buddha does not as a rule desire that a person should ‘accept a thing without understanding’ (Rahula 1974, 3) but that he or she should ‘see’ (Rahula 1974, 9).

3. One statement attributed to the Buddha forms an exception:
   Bhikkhus, for a faithful disciple, who is intent on fathoming the Teacher’s Dispensation, it is proper that he conducts himself thus: ‘The Blessed One is the Teacher, I am the Disciple; the Blessed One knows, I do not know’. (MN I 480)
   This remark, however, may be explained by the fact that the Buddha is addressing bhikkhus
It is seeing and experiencing that the Buddha values, and this emphasis underlies and explains his first statement to the Kālāmas, quoted above. They rightly have doubt, he says, in a ‘matter which is doubtful’ (Rahula 1974, 1), that is in choosing between doctrines, but when it comes to the choice of a teacher, abstract doctrine is not what matters so much as the effect of the doctrine on one who sees and experiences it fully and practices in accordance with it, and in this area the Buddha says there can be no doubt, no option for the Kālāmas but to choose a Buddha disciple.

In all four passages, there is no mention of any thought that might lead to disagreement with the Buddha. The word translated as ‘inviting inspection’ in Gotama’s description of his Dhamma cited above (in 6) is ehipassika which, as Johansson points out (1981, 22), literally means ‘come-and-see-ish’, but the combination of the two imperatives is unlikely to carry the associations which it sets up in modern English usage – ‘come and have a look’ or ‘see if there’s anything you like’ or ‘take anything you can use’. None of these has any place in the Buddha’s envisaged approach by others to his Dhamma; they are all too casual and the last two too selective. ‘Ehipassika’ is likely to refer to a process of revelation (without that word’s connotations of extreme emotion): if you come you will see, see the Truth. Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda translates it ‘to be but approached to be seen’ (1996, 44).

‘Freedom of thought’, as we think of the term, is not what the Buddha advocates. In this respect, an overall corrective to Rahula is Bhikkhu Bodhi’s observation (2000):

> Though Buddhist modernists sometimes claim that the Buddha said that one should believe only what one can verify for oneself, no such statement is found in the Pali canon. What the Buddha does say is that we should not accept his teachings blindly but should enquire into their meaning and attempt to realize their truth in oneself.

‘RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE’

Rahula’s evidence (1974, 10) for his second claim, that the Buddha shows religious tolerance, is also threefold. Firstly, he cites from the Cānki Sutta (MN II 164–77), ‘it is not proper for a wise man who preserves truth to come to the definite conclusion: “Only this is true, anything else is wrong”’ (MN II 171). Direct Buddha statement and solid evidence it would appear, but again a somewhat different picture emerges if we take the remark in context and bear in mind the Buddha’s repeated emphasis on the value of experiencing the Dhamma. The person who is described here as preserving truth is, says Gotama, a person who has come to a certain belief through one of five things: ‘faith, approval, oral tradition, reasoned who have been ‘practising the wrong way’ and engaged in ‘haggling’, that is if we accept that a Buddha statement may be influenced by circumstances.
cogitation (ākāra-parivitakko), and reflective acceptance of a view (diṭṭhi-nijjhāna-khanti)’ (MN II 170), and any and all of these, he says, may possibly lead to a belief that is true but just as possibly to one that is false. So in this instance the one who believes preserves truth by appreciating the non-absoluteness of his view. Then the Buddha makes a distinction between this preservation of truth (saccānurakkhāna) and the ‘discovery (saccānubodho) of it’ (MN II 171). ‘Discovery’, he says, arises not from any of the five things he has mentioned but from a process similar to the one outlined in the Vinamsaka Sutta: a lay person investigates a bhikkhu; he finds him to be purified of the three states of greed, hate and delusion; he is filled with faith (MN II 173); he undertakes a rigorous examination of the bhikkhu’s Dhamma and gains a ‘reflective acceptance’ of it, thence arises zeal, application of will, scrutiny, striving, and ‘he realizes with the body the ultimate truth (parama-saccaṃ) and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom’ (MN II 173). The ‘reflective acceptance’ is at first sight surprising since, as we have seen, ‘reflective acceptance of a view’ is one of the five factors which the Buddha says may lead to a belief that is true or false; but here the acceptance is preceded by personal investigation of the bhikkhu-teacher in terms of whether he shows any signs of greed, hatred or delusion. And ‘acceptance’ is not the same as ‘final arrival at truth’ (saccānupatti); that comes with ‘the repetition, development, and cultivation of these same things’ (MN II 173–74). The distinction between the preserver of truth on the one hand and the arriver at it on the other is a distinction between one who has come to an unspecified belief as against one who has fully experienced the Buddha’s Dhamma, and the Buddha does not say that the latter should refrain from seeing the truth he has arrived at as ‘ultimate’. In a movement not unlike that found in the Kesaputta Sutta, seeming religious tolerance has turned into affirmation of what comes across as the one true Dhamma.

A second source used by Rahula as evidence of the Buddha’s tolerance is another Buddha statement, this time from the Sutta-nipāta. As translated by Rahula: ‘To be attached to one thing (a certain view) and to look upon other things (views) as inferior – this the wise man calls a fetter’ (Rahula 1974, 10). The words in brackets are Rahula’s additions, but even if we were to accept them, the statement again needs to be seen in its context. It is part of a section entitled ‘The Highest’ (Paramatṭhaka Sutta, Sn.796–803), in which the Buddha criticizes taking one’s own view as ‘the highest’, and describes the qualities of a bhikkhu who has reached an extremely advanced stage within the Discipline. Such a monk, he says, may attain to a state of mind in which he ‘does not depend upon (anything) seen, heard or thought, or virtuous conduct or vows’ (Sn.798); he has transcended all differentiations of views, and has done so through the Buddha’s teaching. There is no suggestion that any other teaching might have been as effective.

Rahula’s third source in this respect is the Upāli Sutta (MN I 371–87). When Upāli asks to be accepted as a lay follower, the Buddha advises him to continue to give alms to his former teachers, the Nigaṇṭhas (Jains). This touch of respect, however, is a sutta device used to highlight the Buddha’s superiority; it makes Upāli all the more devoted. At the end of the sutta he utters a hymn of praise to the Buddha.
in the presence of Nātaputta, the Nigañṭhas’ leader, and Nātaputta is said to be so humiliated that ‘hot blood there and then gushed from his mouth’ (MN I 387). The *sutta* has thus become a none too subtle attempt to glorify the Buddha and to discredit another religious leader.4

What evidence is there outside these sources postulated by Rahula for the Buddha’s putative tolerance and respect? The wanderer Sandaka says that in the *Saṅgha*, ‘there is no lauding of one’s own Dhamma and no disparaging of the Dhamma of others’ (MN I 523), but once again the effect of the remark in its context is the opposite of respect. It is part of a disparagement of the Ājīvikas, who are said to ‘laud themselves’ and ‘disparage others’ (M I 524). As for the Buddha himself, one of his questions does suggest religious tolerance. He asks the householders of Sālā: ‘Householders, is there any teacher agreeable to you in whom you have acquired faith supported by reasons (ākāravatī saddhā)?’ (MN I 401). Is the Buddha freely admitting that apart from himself there may be, or even are, teachers of faiths ‘supported by reasons’, or is he being portrayed as the all-knowing Buddha, knowing in advance the householders’ answer, which, as any habitual *sutta*-reader would expect, is that there is not. Either way, the effect of the sequence is once more to emphasize the Buddha’s uniqueness as against inferior teachers, that is all other teachers. Gotama goes on to tell the householders that his own teaching is ‘incontrovertible’ (*apaṇṇaka*, MN I 401).

More seemingly impressive in this respect is the Buddha’s professed willingness to accommodate the particular teacher, views and practices involved in another faith in order to work with its adherents towards what may prove beneficial for them. When he talks to an assembly of ‘wanderers’ (*paribbājaka*) on these lines, he shows at first a refreshing tolerance and respect for their own customs. After reassuring them that his *Dhamma* leads to release, he says:

> you may think: ‘The ascetic Gotama says this in order to get disciples’. But you should not regard it like that. Let him who is your teacher remain your teacher. Or you may think: ‘He wants us to abandon our rules’. But you should not regard it like that. Let your rules remain as they are. Or you may think: ‘He wants us to abandon our way of life’. But you should not regard it like that. Let your way of life remain as it was. Or you may think: ‘He wants to establish us in the doing of things that according to our teaching are wrong, and are so considered among us’. But you should not regard it like that. Let those things you consider wrong continue to be so considered.

(DN III 56)

---

4. The same is true of a very similar *sutta* not mentioned by Rahula, ‘Śīha the General’ (AN IV 179–88). In it the same elements form a parallel structure. The Jain adherent and would-be Buddha lay-disciple is in this case the general; the same touch of respect is evident in the Buddha’s advice that he should continue to give alms to the Jains; this has the same effect, to increase the intensity of Śīha’s eulogy of the Buddha; the climax shows the same black-white judgement when the Jains are described as spreading false rumours about the Buddha and Śīha announces that they ‘do no harm to the Exalted One by their wicked, vain, lying, untruthful slanders’ (AN IV 188).
Here, one might say, is the respectful figure that Rahula sees and admires. That is, until the wanderers react to his persuasion in a way for which he seems unprepared; they remain silent and perplexed and show no signs of moving towards the practice which he encourages, even to try it for a week. At this juncture respect is replaced not merely by disappointment but by a reaction not untypical of religious believers in general. The Buddha is portrayed as labeling all of the wanderers as being on the wrong side of a simplistic moral divide – ‘Every one of these foolish men is possessed by the evil one’ (DN III 57).

The weight of evidence tells against the image of a respectful Gotama. He never says that any other sect provides meaningful answers to the questions that matter. What he does say about other sects is invariably disparaging:

The Unclothed [Jains] are rogues ... of evil desires, of perverse views.

(AN V 150)

Bhikkhus, those ascetics or Brahmins who do not understand ageing-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation; who do not understand birth ... volitional formations, their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to their cessation: these I do not consider to be ascetics among ascetics or Brahmins among Brahmins.

(SN II 14–15)

In whatever Dhamma and discipline the noble eightfold path is not found, no ascetic is found of the first, the second, the third or the fourth grade ... Those other schools are devoid of [true] ascetics.5 (DN II 151)

the wanderers of other sects are blind and visionless. They do not know health. They do not know Nibbāna.

(MN I 510)

The intensity of the disparagement may be debatable in each case, but disparagement it is.

And in full disproof of Sandaka the wanderer’s praise of the Saṅgha, disparagement is sometimes accompanied by self-‘lauding’, as in these statements attributed to the Buddha:

the achievements of ascetics, brahmins, and wanderers of other sects do not amount to a hundredth part, or a thousandth part, or a hundred thousandth part of the achievements of a noble disciple, a person accomplished in view who has made the breakthrough. So great, bhikkhus, is a person accomplished in view who has made the breakthrough.

(SN II 139)

---

5. In this quotation the words ‘those’ and ‘[true]’ are additions by the translator. The statement is intended to apply not just to ‘those’ sects which Gotama has been talking about but to all ‘other’ sects.
But who are these foolish, thoughtless wanderers of other sects that they could understand the Tathāgata’s great exposition of action?

(MN III 209)

The glow worm shines as long as the sun has not risen, but when that luminant arises, the glow worm’s light is quenched and shines no more. Even so, the wanderers shine only so long as Fully Awakened Ones do not appear in the world. These thinkers are not purified nor yet their disciples, for those of perverse views are not released from suffering.

(Ud 73)

It may be particularly surprising to some readers of Rahula that the Buddha reserves his most categorical dismissal of other beliefs for any view that denies, for instance, the existence of spontaneously arisen beings in the heavenly realms, and any view which does not credit the existence of ‘another world’ (MN I 402). In the Kesaputta Sutta, Gotama approves of a hypothetical disciple who has doubts about (though does not deny) any future existence and who follows the Dhamma because it produces benefits in this life (AN I 192), but this is highly unusual and strikes a discordant note when set against the Buddha’s own certainty throughout the suttas of the ‘fact’ of rebirth as the condition from which his Dhamma gives ‘guarantee (pāṭibhoja)’ of escape (It.3). Is it possible that the Kālāmas had expressed doubts over this aspect of the Dhamma and needed an unusual form of persuasion? Over and over the Buddha iterates and reiterates his assurance of next-life benefits for those who do good deeds, especially those who give alms to the Saṅgha. Here is his opinion of those who are skeptical (numbers added):

[1] Since there actually is another world, one who holds the view ‘there is no other world’ has wrong view. [2] Since there actually is another world, one who intends ‘there is no other world’ has wrong intention. [3] Since there actually is another world, one who makes the statement ‘there is no other world’ has wrong speech. [4] Since there actually is another world, one who says ‘there is no other world’ is opposed to those arahants who know the other world. [5] Since there actually is another world, one who convinces another ‘there is no other world’ convinces him to accept an untrue Dhamma; and because he convinces another to accept an untrue Dhamma, he praises himself and disparages others. [6] Thus any pure virtue formerly had is abandoned and corrupt conduct is substituted.

(MN I 402)

This statement evinces five closely linked facets not uncommon in other religions: firstly an absolute belief in the teaching as the truth (throughout); secondly a belief that holy people experience this truth as certainty: they ‘know’ it (4); thirdly an assumption that people of different beliefs from one’s own ‘intend’ (2) their beliefs rather than simply believe them; fourthly the conviction that this ‘intention’ is evil (5 & 6); fifthly that because of their evil beliefs people believing what oneself does not believe will do evil things – ‘corrupt conduct’ (6).
Not dissimilar is the Buddha’s pronouncement that anyone who says that Gotama ‘does not have any superhuman states’ will ‘wind up in hell’ (MN I 71). The Buddha sees the universe as morally ordered to reflect his own rightness and the wrongness of those who deny it.

CONCLUSION

Three things mitigate against the above impression of disrespect. Gotama does have friendly conversations with wanderers of other (usually unstated) beliefs;⁶ he does discourage his adherents from scorning others (e.g. DN III 44–45); above all he insists on non-violence as intrinsic to his Dhamma (e.g. MN I 186). Nonetheless, respect for other faiths is not a salient mark of Gotama, nor does he encourage thought outside the parameters of the Dhamma. He is no propounder of an open life-style. Could it be otherwise in suttas which proclaim a (one of a line) and the (for our time) ‘fully enlightened’ (e.g. MN I 320) Buddha whose Dhamma ‘dispels with its shining and beaming and radiance any other doctrines whatever’ (MN I 317)?

Present-day Buddhists may not be overly concerned that the founding figure of the teaching to which by name they ascribe does not associate himself with some of the values which they may themselves espouse. Even so it might not be a bad thing for any of us as far as is possible to see these things ‘as they are’ (yathābhutam).

ABBREVIATIONS


It Itivuttaka, translated by John D. Ireland. In The Udāna and Itivuttaka (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1997).


Ud Udāna, translated by John D. Ireland. The Udāna and Itivuttaka. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1997).

⁶. See, for instance DN III 33–34, though the conversation here ends up by emphasising the need to put one’s trust in the Buddha.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Dhammananda, Venerable K Sri. 1996. Daily Buddhist Devotions, reprinted and donated by the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taiwan, for free distribution.

