

Dharmic Views and Dharmic Practices

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Many people, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, naively assume there is only one Buddhism. Non-Buddhists often do so out of ignorance of the diversity existing in Buddhist circles, and Buddhists often do so because they assume the tradition they are following is the authentic Buddhism, or it represents the true spirit or the complete form of the Buddha's teachings. Studying Buddhism in the United States where all traditions of Buddhism can be found, I have heard many people willfully ignore the differences among Buddhist traditions and claim the tradition they know of to be the one true Buddhism. For example, I have encountered a Pure Land Buddhist who, upon learning that I studied the *Nikāya-s*, questioned why I would waste time studying the Theravada texts instead of focusing on the 'true spirit' of Buddhism, that is: Mahāyāna. Similarly, some Vajrayānist friends wondered why I did not devote my life to Vajrayāna practice given that as a scholar I should have "known better" and recognized that it was in Vajrayāna that the Buddha's teaching reached its complete form. Meanwhile, I continue to hear comments from people whose first encounter with Buddhism was a demystified, ascetic-bent version of Theravāda, comments such as "you Chinese people just like to mix traditions together; Chinese Buddhism is not pure Buddhism" or "I don't care about culture; I only care about what the Buddha said; Buddhism is what the Buddha actually said, and Japanese Buddhism is just culture." It seems that people who recognize only one Buddhism inevitably elevate one tradition at the expense of all other traditions.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are people who recognize the existence and value of many different forms of Buddhism and in fact magnify the cultural variations to the extent of asserting that there are many "buddhisms," each of which makes sense in its own culture and is incommensurable with another. In this approach, Buddhism is what the local culture makes it to be, and Buddhists of one culture have no ground evaluating the views and practices of Buddhists of another culture, just as the followers of one religion have no business judging the followers of another religion. Being a person whose academic training and teaching career involve religious pluralism and global ethics, this cultural relativist approach is appealing and troubling at the same time. On the one hand, this approach affirms all vehicles of Buddhism and avoids the pitfall of privileging one Buddhist tradition while disparaging others. On the other hand, differences are so amplified and reified in this relativist approach that it becomes meaningless to even ask whether or not a view or practice is Buddhist when the understanding is there are many Buddhisms.

Is there one Buddhism or many? What is Buddhist and what is not? Buddhists generally hold that the Buddha's teachings are universal, but is that universality predicated on uniformity? Reversely, does the acknowledgment and acceptance of diverse traditions mean that no view or practice can be recognized as Buddhist by all Buddhists? Is it possible to find or construct any unifying principle without elevating a certain tradition and dismissing all others? Would such a unifying view necessarily impose an unrealistic and unwanted uniformity on diverse Buddhist traditions? Well in accordance with the Buddha's teachings, I will argue that Buddhist traditions, as all phenomena in the

world, are neither one nor many, neither uniform nor completely different. By referencing the *Nikāya*-s in the Pāli Canon, I will attempt to show that certain views are indeed at the core of the Buddha's teachings and thus can be identified as the unifying views of Buddhism. The unifying views, paradoxically, allow and even require huge diversity.

My choice of citing the *Nikāya*-s does not indicate any endorsement of the claim made by some Theravādins and scholars of Theravāda that Theravāda Buddhism is the "authentic" or "pure" Buddhism that has preserved the Buddha's original teachings without change. Rather, the choice is made based on the practicality of searching for unifying views that are genuinely unifying. Theravādins generally consider the Pāli Canon to be the authentic teaching of the Buddha and remain suspicious of many of the texts preserved in the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna collections. Mahāyānists and Vajrayānists, on the other hand, generally do not question the legitimacy of the Pāli Canon, even though they may consider their respective tradition to be the superior and ultimate form of Buddhism and may consider the Pāli Canon a product of the Buddha's "skillful means" that caters to people of lesser capacities.¹ That is, Buddhists across traditions recognize early Buddhist literature as the basic and foundational texts of Buddhism, and more often than not they "see themselves as directly in the line of that early Buddhism."² More importantly, various forms of "Modern Buddhism," such as the multiple strains of "Engaged Buddhism" taking place simultaneously in different regions, east and west, "Critical Buddhism" in Japan, "Buddhism for the Human Realm" in Taiwan, and numerous Western Buddhist sanghas, all see themselves as a return to the Buddhist *Dhamma* practiced at the time of the historical Buddha and all appeal to the early Buddhist literature.³ Therefore, for any view to be recognized as being in accordance with the *Buddhadharma* by Buddhists across traditions, it has to be supported by texts that all Buddhists would consider basic and foundational.

The singular goal of the Buddha's teaching is *nibbāna*, the cessation of *dukkha*. Therefore, a view or practice that is not conducive to the cessation or alleviation of

¹ In the Pāli Canon, the term *upāya-kosalla* (Sanskrit: *upāya-kauśalya*), commonly translated as "skillful means" or "expedient means," occurs infrequently and simply denotes the Buddha's marvelous skills in expounding the *Dhamma*. In Mahāyāna texts, by contrast, the term has mainly been used to claim Mahāyāna's superiority to all older non-Mahāyānist schools. The followers of those schools might believe they had received and practiced the authentic, ultimate *Dhamma* directly from the Buddha. The early Mahāyānists, however, contend that the historical Buddha lied about the ultimacy, and the older teachings were in fact limited and restricted, for they were tailored for the early followers who were of more selfish inclinations and/or lesser spiritual potentials. At a glance, this Mahāyānist claim might seem to be disparaging of the Buddha (not to say disparaging of all older schools and all early followers), for it seems to accuse the Buddha of breaking the precept of no lying. In the Mahāyānist rendition, nonetheless, the seemingly morally wrong act of lying is in fact the Buddha's *upāya* for the purpose of convincing selfish people of lesser capacities to follow his teachings. By dismissing all older schools as the results of the Buddha's *upāya*, the early Mahāyānists branded them "Hīnayāna," the Small Raft, and considered itself providing "Mahāyāna," the Great Raft, an vehicle that is big enough to transport all sentient beings from the shore of endless suffering to the far-shore of *nibbāna*. Modern-day Mahāyānists who have been educated in Buddhist history do not hold this assumption any more, and yet less educated ones still commonly assume that Theravādins are the same as "Hīnayānists" and that "Hīnayānists" lack compassionate consideration for others. For the meaning of *upāya*, see Damien Keown, comp, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 318. **Editor's Footnote:** Since the disparaging term has been rendered obsolete since 1950, it's disparaging to continue to try to use it, even ever-so slyly. Please review the landmark decision to eliminate the derogatory term, from the 1950 World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference, spearheaded by the effort of Ven. Rapule Rahula – see, for instance, this – accessed on 17 November 2011: http://www.chuadieuaph.us/English_Section/essays/rahula_theravada_mahayana.asp

² Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 30.

³ See Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Modern Buddhism: Readings for the Unenlightened* (London: Penguin Books, 2002); Scott Pacey, "A Buddhism for the Human World: Interpretations of Renjian Fojiang in Contemporary Taiwan," *Asian Studies Review* 29 (March 2005): 61–77.

dukkha is not worth endeavoring for Buddhists, let alone holding onto.⁴ That is, according to the Buddhist *Dhamma*, the cessation of *dukkha*, rather than group identity or cultural boundary, is the criterion for adopting a view or practice. The Buddha on numerous occasions discouraged his followers from dogmatically clinging to philosophical views or religious doctrines. In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, for instance, the Buddha said that religions came into dispute with one another “because of lust for views, because of adherence, bondage, greed, obsession and cleaving to views.”⁵ In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha said it was in terms of not propounding “full understanding of clinging to views” and not propounding “full understanding of clinging to rules and observances” that a teaching would be “unemancipating” and “unconducive to peace.”⁶ Even when talking about his own teaching, the Buddha cautioned against clinging and then reiterated that the purpose of imparting or learning or practicing the *Dhamma* was emancipation and cessation of *dukkha*; the goal was NOT to accredit oneself or one’s group with authority or superiority.⁷

Bhikkhus, both formerly and now what I teach is *dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha*. If others abuse, revile, scold, and harass the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account feels no annoyance, bitterness, or dejection of the heart. And if others honour, respect, revere, and venerate the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account feels no delight, joy, or elation of the heart.”⁸

And the Buddha went on to suggest that his listeners adopt the same attitude. He taught the *Dhamma* in order to cease *dukkha*, not to provide an anchor for identity clinging or any form of self-absorbed dejection or elation. And his followers were instructed to do the same.

The Buddha likened his *Dhamma* to a raft, which was built solely for the purpose of crossing a great expanse of dangerous water and reaching the far shore that was safe and free from fear. He asked his listeners to reason about the proper use of the raft:

By doing what would that man be doing what should be done with that raft? Here, bhikkhus, when that man got across and had arrived at the far shore, he might think thus: “...Suppose I were to haul it onto the dry land or set it adrift in the water, and then go wherever I want.” Now, bhikkhus, it is by so doing that that man would be doing what should be done with that raft. So I have shown you how the *Dhamma* is similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping.

⁴ Sallie B. King, *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press), 80-2; Santikaro Bhikkhu, “Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Life and Society through the Natural Eyes of Voidness,” in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, edited by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 156-57; Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, 3rd edition (Bombay, India: Siddharth Publications, 1984), 254-5; Phra Prayudh Payutto, *Buddhadhamma: Natural Laws and Values for Life*, translated by Grant A. Olson (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 85-6 and 165.

⁵ *Anguttara Nikāya*, II.iv.6.

⁶ *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.66-67 (*Cūlasīhanāda Sutta*).

⁷ The same point is noted by Bhikkhu Chao Chu in “Buddhism and Dialogue Among the World Religions: Meeting the Challenge of Materialistic Skepticism,” in *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society: New Directions in a Pluralistic World*, edited by Joseph Runzo (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 170-71.

⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.140 (*Alagaddūpama Sutta*); see also *Samyutta Nikāya*, III.119 (*Khandhasamyutta*).

Bhikkhus, when you know the *Dhamma* to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even the teachings, how much more so things contrary to the teachings.⁹

The Buddha gave teachings for people to practice and utilize so that *dukkha* would cease in their lives. The teachings in and of themselves were not meant to be sacred or inalterable. They could be abandoned, as the simile showed, once they served the purpose of transporting people across the *dukkha*-filled body of water. In fact, they *should* be abandoned if they did not help alleviate *dukkha* or, worse, ended up producing more of it.

Having the cessation of *dukkha* as the criterion also means that a teaching helpful in removing *dukkha* from life should be learned and put into practice, even if it was not given by the Buddha or a Buddhist master in one's own tradition. In the famous *Kālāma Sutta*, the Buddha taught his followers not to cling to or dismiss a teaching on account of the identity, lineage, school, or denomination of the teacher.¹⁰ Whether a teaching is to be accepted and practiced depends on whether it is conducive to the cessation of *dukkha*. Whether or not the teaching is popular or the norm in one's own philosophical, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural group is ultimately irrelevant.

What kind of views and practices would be considered conducive to the cessation of *dukkha*? The Buddha was reported to have said that it is through not understanding interdependent co-arising that “this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, covered as with a blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, the ill destiny, ruin and the round of birth-and-death.”¹¹ For as long as people do not understand the ways in which persons and psycho-socio-cultural forces co-arise and inter-condition one another, they keep behaving themselves in such ways that produce and reproduce *dukkha* for others as well as for themselves. Eventually the vicious cycle of *dukkha* production is formed and people are caught up in it and unable to “pass beyond states of woe.” If not understanding interdependent co-arising leads to *dukkha*, as it is presented in the quote, then the cessation of *dukkha* cannot be effected without understanding interdependent co-arising.

It has been established among both early Buddhists who compiled the *Nikāya*-s and contemporary Buddhist scholars that interdependent co-arising is the central teaching of the Buddha that can string all of his teachings together. In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, Sāriputta (Sanskrit: Śāriputra), who traditionally has been recognized as the wisest and most scholarly among the Buddha's direct disciples, reported: “this has been said by the Blessed One: ‘One who sees dependent origination sees the *Dhamma*; one who sees the *Dhamma* sees dependent origination.’”¹² Similarly, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, Ānanda, reportedly the Buddha's closest disciple and his personal attendant, was amazed at the fact that the entire meaning of the Buddha's teachings could be stated by a single phrase, i.e. interdependent co-arising.¹³ David J. Kalupahana, author of *Ethics in Early Buddhism* and *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, states, “The Buddha's explanation of the nature of existence is summarized in one word, *paṭiccasamuppāda* (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*),”¹⁴ i.e., co-arising. Thai Buddhist activist-scholar Sulak Sivaraksa writes, “The concept of

⁹ *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.134-135 (*Alagaddūpama Sutta*). See also Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, with Anthony Tribe (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 38-40; Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History, and Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 31.

¹⁰ *Anguttara Nikāya*, I.186-187; duplicated in III.65.

¹¹ *Dīgha Nikāya*, ii.55 (*Mahānidāna Sutta*).

¹² *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.190-191 (*Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta*).

¹³ *Samyutta Nikāya*, II.36 (*Nidānasamyutta*).

¹⁴ David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 53. Also in David R. Loy, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 182.

interdependent co-arising is the crux of Buddhist understanding.¹⁵ Engaged Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy points out that *paṭiccasamuppāda* was what the Buddha realized under the *bodhi* tree, and that it serves not only as an explanation of human existence, but also the ground for Buddhist morality and the means for liberation.¹⁶

Interdependent co-arising is the core, the summary, and the logic of the Buddhist *Dhamma*. Some may think that the Four Noble Truths are the summary of the Buddha's teachings, and many Buddhist masters begin their series of *dhamma* talks with the Four Noble Truths, honoring the tradition that they were the first *Dhamma* talk given by the Buddha after his *nibbāna*. However, that first *Dhamma* talk was first directed at the five wandering ascetics with whom the Buddha had once practiced austerities and meditation. According to the early texts, all of them had attained very advanced levels of ethical discipline and mental training. The very concise first *Dhamma* talk directed at those advanced practitioners might not be suitable as the first talk to average people who have little or no background in mental training and whose level of ethical discipline is probably not comparable to that of those five ascetics. The Four Noble Truths are undeniably central in the Buddhist *Dhamma*, but the reasoning behind the Four Noble Truths, behind the arising and cessation of *dukkha*, is interdependent co-arising. In fact, "wisdom" in Buddhism is frequently defined as seeing co-arising, seeing "into the arising and passing away of phenomena, which is noble and penetrative and leads to the complete destruction of suffering."¹⁷ In the *Samyutta Nikāya*, it is said that having "correct wisdom" means one is able to see, as it really is, "this dependent origination and these dependently arisen phenomena."¹⁸ Likewise, being mindful in Buddhism is to be mindful of the formation or arising of phenomena in the world, including one's body, one's mind, and one's very own existence.¹⁹

Given that any one phenomenon depends on multiple causes and conditions to come into existence and in turn is merely one among many causes or conditions for other phenomena, the "logic" revealed by the teaching of interdependent co-arising is not linear causality, but network causality. "Buddhist causality," Nicholas F. Gier and Paul Kjellberg state, "is seen as a cosmic web of causal conditions rather than linear and mechanical notions of push-pull causation."²⁰ Instead of seeing one and only one cause leading to one and only one effect without being affected by the effect, interdependent co-arising points to multiple causes, multiple effects, and mutual influences among phenomena in the world. To see interdependent co-arising is to see the causes, origins, and conditions²¹ of phenomena, to understand the network of origination, and to comprehend under what conditions have things and events in human life come to be what they are. Therefore, from a *Dhammic* perspective, a view that presumes only one cause for all existing problems or proposes only one measure as the solution to all problems is to be viewed with more suspicion than those that acknowledge the intricate interrelations among multiple causes and recommend multiple measures simultaneously for dealing with

¹⁵ Sulak Sivaraksa, *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalized World* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 71.

¹⁶ Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 26-7 and 40.

¹⁷ *Anguttara Nikāya*, IV.94; also V.2, VIII.30, VIII.49, VIII.54, and IX.3.

¹⁸ *Samyutta Nikāya*, II.27 (*Nidānasamyutta*).

¹⁹ *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.55-63 (*Satipatthāna Sutta*).

²⁰ Nicholas F. Gier and Paul Kjellberg, "Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will: Pali and Mahayanist Responses," in *Freedom and Determinism*, edited by Joseph Keim Campbell, Michael O'Rourke, and David Shier (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004), 284.

²¹ In the Pāli tradition, *hetu* (cause), *samudaya* (origin), and *paccaya* (condition) have been understood as synonyms. *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.57 (*Mahānidāna Sutta*). See also Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Introduction" to the Book of Causation (*Nidānavagga*), in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2002), 516.

dukkha-filled and *dukkha*-inducing situations. Insofar as people interdependently co-arise with their socio-cultural contexts, any view or practice purported to be conducive to the alleviation of *dukkha* has to be practical and practicable within the given socio-cultural conditionings in order to be truly *dukkha*-alleviating.

Moreover, for any view to strike a chord with the audience, for any theory to be persuasive to the audience, for any practice to be actually practiced by the audience, it has to be relevant to the life experience of the audience. Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, authors of *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, observe that “the Buddha was fully aware of the brāhmanical cultural bedrock on which so many of his potential converts operated and knew that to extend his influence he would be required to present his teachings and normative forms of conduct within the traditionally patterned forms of behavior.”²² The Buddha was very skillful in making use of the beliefs and concepts permeating the Indian culture at his time in order to bring, gradually and gently, his interlocutors to understand and practice the *dukkha*-alleviating *Dhamma*, whether or not they planned to become Buddhist renunciates or identify themselves as lay followers of the Buddha.²³ For example, although taking a non-theistic viewpoint and discouraging metaphysical speculations, the Buddha frequently talked about the gods in the Hindu pantheon, as well as *kamma* and rebirth, all of which were common beliefs in his day.²⁴

In addition to re-appropriating the accepted concepts in the larger socio-cultural context, the Buddha also adapted to the particular dispositions and capacities of his interlocutors. Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi note that the Buddha “explains the principles he has seen in the way most appropriate for his auditors.”²⁵ The same point was made by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. in his introduction to *Buddhist Hermeneutics*: “The Buddha is said to have taught different things to different people based on their interests, dispositions, capacities, and levels of intelligence.”²⁶ In dialoguing with brāhmins such as Vāsettha,²⁷ Sundarika Bhāradvāja,²⁸ Sigālaka,²⁹ and Kūtadanta,³⁰ the Buddha appealed to each person’s beliefs and practices in order to bring them to practice the *dukkha*-ceasing *Dhamma*. Bhikkhu Ānanda observes that the Buddha, when addressing rural folks, used similes that were familiar to them, such as bullock cart, seed, or irrigation ditch, so that his teachings could be more easily comprehended.³¹

As a matter of fact, the *Nikāya*-s present the Buddha first and foremost as a teacher, a human being who came to understand interconditionality and sought to teach it out of compassion, not some speculator who invented doctrines or some supra-human being who imposed rules:

²² Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 241.

²³ John J. Makransky, “Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present.” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 344 and 346; Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 7; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 29.

²⁴ James R. Egge, in particular, studied the way in which the Buddha ethicized the concept of *kamma* in *Religious Giving and the Invention of Karma in Theravāda Buddhism* (Richmond, England: Curzon Press, 2002), 41-67.

²⁵ Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Introduction II,” in *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Anguttara Nikāya*, selected and translated from the Pāli by Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1999), 13.

²⁶ Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Introduction,” in *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu, Hawai’i: University of Hawai’i Press, 1988), 3.

²⁷ *Dīgha Nikāya* i.246-251 (*Tevijja Sutta*);

²⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya*, i.39 (*Vatthūpama Sutta*).

²⁹ *Dīgha Nikāya* iii.180-192 (*Sigālaka Sutta*).

³⁰ *Dīgha Nikāya* i.143-148 (*Kūtadanta Sutta*).

³¹ Bhikkhu Ānanda, “The Buddhist Approach to the Scriptures,” *Journal of Dharma* 21, no. 4 (October–December 1996): 370–1.

Whether Tathāgata arise in the world or not, it still remains a fact, a firm and necessary condition of existence, that all formations are impermanent... that all formations are subject to suffering ... that all things are non-self. A Tathāgata fully awakens to this fact and penetrates it. Having fully awakened to it and penetrated it, he announces it, teaches it, makes it known, presents it, discloses it, analyses it and explains it: that all formations are impermanent, that all formations are subject to suffering, that all things are non-self.³²

All Buddhist traditions hold that people can understand the formations and cessations of phenomena on their own without receiving revelations of any kind from any specific deity or person, and that the Buddha was one such person who understood, practiced, and realized a way of life that will be conducive to the cessation of *dukkha*. He taught what he had discovered and realized. He taught in order to enhance the listeners' comprehension of the conditions and conditionality of existence and to motivate them to engage in conscious, self-initiated trainings and practices that would help alleviate *dukkha* for all beings in the interconnected web of life.

To highlight the Buddha's role as a teacher is to understand that the Buddha's words as recorded in the early Buddhist texts such as the *Nikāya*-s were uttered in the middle of the process of teaching and for the purpose of teaching, and so as all other scriptures in later traditions. For any teaching to be understood and practiced, it has to reflect the immediate objectives of that particular moment, to appeal to what the targeted audience take for granted, and to suit the interests, dispositions, and capacities of the learners. Inasmuch as the causes and conditions of *dukkha* are different for each culture, and in fact different for each person, teachers with the cessation of *dukkha* in mind need to find myriad different ways to teach. The teachings that could induce *dukkha*-alleviating understandings and practices in Northeastern India two thousand and five hundred years ago may or may not be able to induce *dukkha*-alleviating understandings and practices in another space-time. Therefore, it is not being true to the Buddha's own teachings to demand or impose uniformity in terms of *dukkha*-alleviating views and practices. It is an illusion to think that "if people would only behave and think correctly, we'd all practice the same religion."³³ The Buddha himself said that all he ever taught was the cessation of *dukkha* and the Buddha himself cautioned against clinging to views or group identity. For the purpose of transporting more beings, all of whom conditioned by their particular socio-cultural contexts, to the shore of the cessation of *dukkha*, Buddhists should not cling to a particular view or practice simply because it is taught in their tradition. They should certainly not cling to any traditional teaching if it is no longer practical in the particular space-time in which they find themselves. In the same spirit, they need not hesitate to employ rafts previously not found in their own tradition, if those rafts are conducive to the cessation of *dukkha* in their current contexts.

For Buddhism, the uniformity-diversity dichotomy is a false dichotomy, and so is the dichotomy of universalism and particularism. The unifying *Dhammic* perspective is interdependent co-arising, and the unifying *Dhammic* vision is the cessation of *dukkha*. Buddhism is quite universalistic in its analysis of all phenomena in the world in terms of interdependent co-arising, and it is universalistic in its goal of liberating all sentient beings from *dukkha*. And yet the "logic" of interdependent co-arising and the goal of cessation of *dukkha* allow and, in fact, require much diversity in teachings and practices. The co-arising of and around a person is different from that of and around another person,

³² *Samyutta Nikāya* II.25; *Anguttara Nikāya*, III.134. See also Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 29; Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, 77.

³³ Rita M. Gross, "Buddhist History for Buddhist Practitioners," *Tricycle*, Fall 2010: 118.

and so the *duhkha* in a person's life is different from that in another person's life. Likewise, the co-arising of each culture is different, and so the *duhkha* pervasive in each culture is different. As such, the cessation of *duhkha* requires attention to particularity and involves a huge variety of views and practices suitable for the person and the culture. Buddhism never falls into complete relativism, though. The cessation of *dukkha* remains the unwavering goal of Buddhism, and therefore a practice that is not conducive to the cessation, or at least alleviation, of *dukkha* is not worth holding onto, even though it might have been the norm in one's tradition for a long time. And interdependent co-arising remains the rationale of all Buddhist teachings, and therefore a view that is not reasonable in light of interdependent co-arising is not a *Dhammic* view.

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