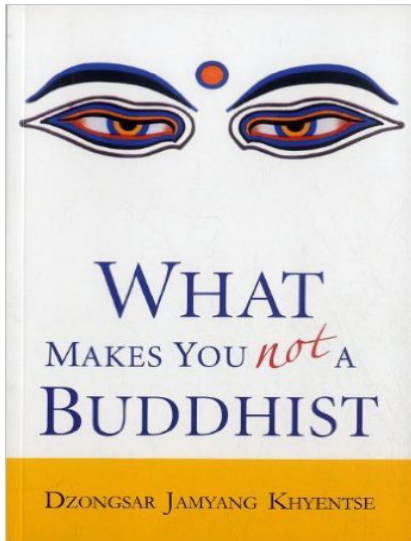


Book Review:

"What makes you not a Buddhist"

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Introduction

The Buddhist philosophical book called '*What makes you not a Buddhist*' written by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (1961) a world famous Bhutanese Buddhist meditation master head of Dzongsar Monastery and College, author of famous book like '*Not four happiness*' and director of moral-movies, is one of the most readable book in these days and ages which is elucidating the four "truths" as in "seals" or hallmarks of Buddhist doctrine. This book was published by 'The Art Book Studio' publication in *Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi, India* in 2009 and reprinted in 2010, 2013.

As above mentioned, through this book an author is discussing the contemporary/traditional view of Buddhist philosophical thoughts called four Dharma seals "truths" with the contemporary language to clarify or

amplify common pragmatic-mistakes that people make while practicing Buddhist Philosophy. At the beginning of the book, venerable Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, relating his personal story on a Trans-Atlantic-Flight, says thoughts occurred in his mind to write this valuable book for the sake of needy human being's salvation of their mistakes while practicing the Buddhist philosophy.

After reading some famous master or monk and author's works, many western as well as eastern both Buddhist and non-Buddhist come to the conclusion that Buddhism is a peaceful religion meditation and non-violence, it is "against the violent acts" etc, therefore, they dismay to offer non-vegetable foods to the monks. Whenever, they see Buddhist monks eating meat, they start to criticizing that monk should not eat meat etc because they are Buddhist monks. And others seem to perceive all the saffron or maroon robes wearer and peaceful smiley people are a Buddhists.

Fanatically or as a traditional Buddhist, we must be pride in such a reputation, particularly the non-violent aspects of Buddhism that we see not in other theological religions. Trough out the history thousands of human kinds had given their lives, husbands lost their wives, and wives lost husbands, parents lost their children and children lost their parents, brothers lost their sisters and sisters lost their brothers due to the religious violence that occurred in the pasts while establishing it. Even today, there are many non-violent acts going on due to extreme religious practices.

Venerable Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse says it's a misunderstanding or misperception. If it is a right understanding or perception then what about the non-traditional-Buddhist people who do not eat meat naturally? Are they Buddhist monks too? If a person could be validated him as a Buddhist due to his peaceful and nice smiley faces, what about the non-Buddhists who is peaceful and nice smiley faced person too? Are they Buddhists too?

Venerable Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse dismayed to agree to be concluded the definition of Buddhism merely in few words like peaceful, non-violent, meditation etc. Instead he pointed out that Buddhism inconceivably complex, deep and profound. Prince Siddhartha was renounced the whole worldly desires, sacrifices comforts and luxuries in the Palace life in order to find or discovered the ultimate truth. After six years attempt, distracting many blockades and barricades from the hungry ghosts, the king of evil one and others problems, he was enlightened (realized the

four noble natural born truths) at the city of Gaya under the Bodhi tree. According to the original scriptures, it was very tough tasks; therefore, this religion cannot be explained with merely simple words like peaceful, non-violent and mediation. Though atheistic, but Buddhism should be learnt with some practical theories to practice it.

To clarify the definition of real Buddhism, Venerable Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse discusses four “truths” or Dharma “seals.” They are;

1. All compounded things are impermanent
2. All emotions are pain
3. All things have no inherent existences
4. Nirvana beyond concepts

Within the book

His first argument is “*all compounded things are impermanent*” therefore, if you cannot accept that all compounded or fabricated things are impermanent, if you believe that there are some essential substances or concepts that is permanent, then you are not a Buddhist.

1) On the first chapter entitling “Fabrication and Impermanence,” Venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** explains what the Buddha found after long time of contemplation: that every phenomenon we perceive is the product of many things temporarily coming together to create to the illusion of independently existing phenomena. The illusion is dissipated when we penetrate to the truth; all that arises ultimately passes away, and that everything is in a state of continuous change. In this very morning planted mango seeds another few days would be grown.

“After a long time of contemplation, [the Buddha] came to the realization that all form, including our flesh and bones, and all our emotions and all our perceptions, are assembled they are the product of two or more things coming together. When any two components or more come together, a new phenomenon emerges nails and wood become a table; water and leaves become tea; fear, devotion, and a savior become God. This end product doesn’t have an existence independent of its parts. Believing it truly exists independently is the greatest deception. Meanwhile the parts have undergone a change. Just by meeting, their character has changed

and, together, they have become something else—they are “compounded.”

Venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** argues that one becomes not Buddhist because he or she refuses to accept this worldly phenomenon. He mentions that one may not be born in a Buddhist family or countries may not wear yellow colored robes, may eat meat, listen Eminem or Paris Hilton but if he accepts those entire worldly phenomenon are impermanent, conditioned to be changed and bring pains, could be regarded as a Buddhist. Most significantly, he mentions that even though, one never have heard the name Buddha (Enlightened one or all knowing one) but he or she accepts that all conditioned things as impermanent and changeable substances, he would be considered as a Buddhist. Since knowingly or unknowingly, they are following the core teaching of the Buddha.

2) In the second chapter “Emotion and Pain” venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** explains what the Buddha uncovered concerning emotions and their relationship to suffering. All conditioned things or emotions are suffering because they cling to the concept or idea of self (I, me, and mine). The Buddha taught that all the conditioned things or emotions (in four Dharma seals) could be identified with the senses of self, whether those senses are positive or negative. The sense that we tend to grasp is called “Positive sense” and the sense that push away is called “Negative sense.” Whether we are tending to grasp the positive sense or pushing away the negative sense, we are trying to cling to the concept of “self” trying to “increase” or “protect” our self. Last but not least, we are attached to the senses of self that is why we faced to the cycle of birth and death to be suffered in every existences till distract all the attachment and tranquilities of self and approach the state of ultimate happiness (Nibbana). Venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** writes;

“Siddhartha was also trying to cut suffering at its root. [...] He explored suffering with an open mind, and through his tireless contemplation Siddhartha discovered that at the root, it is our emotions that lead to suffering. In fact they are suffering. One way or another, directly or indirectly, all emotions are born from selfishness in the sense that they involve clinging to the self. Moreover, he discovered that, as real as they may seem, emotions are not an inherent part of one’s being. [...] Emotions arise when particular causes and conditions come together, such as when you rush to think that someone is criticizing you, ignoring you, or depriving you of some gain. Then the corresponding emotions arise. The moment we accept those emotions, the moment we buy into them, we have lost aware-

ness and sanity. We are “worked up.” Thus Siddhartha found his solution awareness. If you seriously wish to eliminate suffering, you must generate awareness, tend to your emotions, and learn how to avoid getting worked up.”

The deeper analysis of the second seal reveals the roots of emotions as a suffering to be the nonexistent self. This sort of sense of seals developed at the first stages of our life where there we started to think “*this is me, this body is mine etc*” feelings, perceptions, consciousness, thoughts and actions all are mine. This attitude or acceptances then spread we do and experiences. Venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** says;

“All of these various emotions and their consequences come from misunderstanding, and this misunderstanding comes from one source, which is the root of all ignorance clinging to the self. We assume that each of us is a self, that there is an entity called “me.” The self is just another misunderstanding, however. We generally manufacture a notion of self, which feels like a solid entity. We are conditioned to view this notion as consistent and real. We think, I am this form, raising the hand. We think, I have form, this is my body. We think, Form is me, I am tall. We think, I dwell in this form, pointing at the chest. We do the same with feelings, perceptions, and actions. I have feelings, I am my perceptions... But Siddhartha realized that there is no independent entity that qualifies as the self to be found anywhere, whether inside or outside the body. Like the optical illusion of a fire ring, the self is illusory. It is a fallacy, fundamentally flawed and ultimately nonexistent. But just as we can get carried away by the fire ring, we all get carried away by thinking that we are the self. When we look at our own bodies, feelings, perceptions, actions, and consciousness, we see that these are different elements of what we think of as “me,” but if we were to examine them, we would find that “me” doesn’t dwell in any of them. Clinging to the fallacy of the self is a ridiculous act of ignorance; it perpetuates ignorance, and it leads us to all kinds of pain and disappointment. Everything we do in our lives depends on how we perceive our “selves,” so if this perception is based on misunderstandings, which it inevitably is, then this misunderstanding permeates everything we do, see, and experience. It is not a simple matter of a child misinterpreting light and movement; our whole existence is based on very flimsy premises.”

3) In the third chapter venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** discusses “Everything is Emptiness” (Concept of emptiness developed by Bhadanta Nagarjuna) which could be seen various suttas in the scriptures

as 1) “all conditioned things are impermanent ‘non-self’ and ‘emptiness’ (*sabbe sankhara aniccati*), therefore, 2) “all phenomenon conditioned to suffering (*sabbe dhamma anattati*). The modern physics also agree with this phenomenon that “all components are flux.” Venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** describes the way the prince Siddhartha was realized this phenomenon as such;

“Although Siddhartha realized emptiness, emptiness was not manufactured by Siddhartha or anyone else. Emptiness is not the result of his revelation, nor was it developed as a theory to help people be happy. [...] Emptiness doesn’t cancel out our daily experience. Siddhartha never said that something spectacular, better, purer, or more divine exists in place of what we perceive. He wasn’t an anarchist refuting the appearance or function of worldly existence, either. He didn’t say that there is no appearance of a rainbow or that there is no cup of tea. We can enjoy our experience, but just because we can experience something doesn’t mean that it truly exists. Siddhartha simply suggested that we examine our experience and consider that it could be just a temporary illusion, like a daydream.

Siddhartha completely understood that in the relative world you can make a cup of oolong tea and drink it; he would not say “There is no tea” or “Tea is emptiness.” If he were to say anything at all, it would be to suggest that the tea is not as it seems; for example, tea is shrivelled leaves in hot water. But some tea fanatics get carried away with the leaves and composing special mixes, creating names like Iron Dragon and selling small amounts for hundreds of dollars. To them it is not just a leaf in water. It was for this reason that some fifteen hundred years after Siddhartha taught, one of his dharma heirs, named Tilopa, said to his student Naropa, “It is not the appearance that binds you, it’s the attachment to the appearance that binds you.”

The classic Buddhist example used to illustrate emptiness is the snake and the rope. Let’s say there is a cowardly man named Jack who has a phobia about snakes. Jack walks into a dimly lit room, sees a snake coiled up in the corner, and panics. In fact he is looking at a striped Giorgio Armani tie, but in his terror he has misinterpreted what he sees to the point that he could even die of fright—death caused by a snake that does not truly exist. While he is under the impression that it is a snake, the pain and anxiety that he experiences is what Buddhists call “samsara,” which

is a kind of mental trap. Fortunately for Jack, his friend Jill walks into the room. Jill is calm and sane and knows that Jack thinks he sees a snake. She can switch on the light and explain that there is no snake, that it is actually a tie. When Jack is convinced that he is safe, this relief is none other than what Buddhists call “nirvana”—liberation and freedom. But Jack’s relief is based on a fallacy of harm being averted, even though there was no snake and there was nothing to cause his suffering in the first place.

It’s important to understand that by switching on the light and demonstrating that there is no snake; Jill is also saying that there is no absence of the snake. In other words, she cannot say, “The snake is gone now,” because the snake was never there. She didn’t make the snake disappear, just as Siddhartha didn’t make emptiness. This is why Siddhartha insisted that he could not sweep away the suffering of others by waving his hand. Nor could his own liberation be granted or shared piecemeal, like some sort of award. All he could do was explaining from his experience that there was no suffering in the first place, which is like switching on the light for us.”

4) In the fourth chapter venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** explains the concept of ultimate bliss (Nibbana) “Nirvana is beyond the concepts.” In the scriptures, this final seal was not counted as three characteristics of existences which are particularly interesting facts. Namely 1) impermanence (Anicca), 2) suffering (Dukkha), 3) non-self or emptiness (Anatta), which was counted as the first three seals but number fourth seals could be understood through the first and third seals. If all conditioned phenomenon are impermanent, empty and without any inherent existence, then truly we cannot label as tree, mountain, rocks, and river, this me and mine etc. all things are just forms, there are nothing ‘empty.’ In fact, there is nothing to be talked, named and described. This concept is very similar to modern quantum physics too. This emptiness, void processes and non-self are called ‘Nirvana’ because; it is beyond the human thoughts and explanations. But as concepts we understand, therefore we talk and discuss about this concepts.

These same concepts has been captured one of the well known teaching of the Buddha that the path, the vehicle is a temporary like a raft that carries us across a turbulent river. Once we have crossed over the river, we never carry this raft on our back. Instead, having served well, we toss to the enlightenment.

Conclusion

Thus as, in this book venerable **Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse** has provided us with a drop of much needed Dharma drops. He says, once a person drinks this drops of Dharma and follow what the Buddha taught could be regarded as the Buddhist. He has helped us to understand our mistakes while practicing Buddhism and experience the core teaching of the Buddha too.

Reference

What makes you not a Buddhist- by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse- The Art Book Studio' publication in *Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi, India* in 2009 and reprinted in 2010, 2013.