

About the Author

Anne Bancroft was brought up in the Quaker village of Jordans and now attends Bath Meeting. While her four children were growing up she became a lecturer in comparative religion and at the same time began her own quest for spiritual understanding. Over the years she has found strength and inspiration in Buddhism and also a deepening understanding of Western mysticism. She has broadcast on radio and television and is the author of a number of books on spirituality, including *Religions of the East* (1972); *Zen: Direct Pointing to Reality* (1979); *The Luminous Vision: Six Medieval Mystics* (1982); *Origins of the Sacred* (1987); *Weavers of Wisdom: Women Mystics of the Twentieth Century* (1989); *The Spiritual Journey* (1991); *Women in Search of the Sacred* (1986); *The Buddha Speaks* (2000); *The Wisdom of Zen* (2001).

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QUAKERS AND BUDDHISM: THE CUTTING EDGE

ANNE BANCROFT

Before I begin this pamphlet I would like to reassure readers that I have some knowledge about both aspects of the subject, which I want to address quite deeply. So here is a short personal history.

I was brought up in the Quaker village of Jordans and although my parents, Arthur and Margaret Hayward, were not Friends when we arrived (they joined later) we went to Meeting regularly and Quaker attitudes seeped into my bones.

But when I was in my teens and fiercely against what I judged as hypocrisy, I rejected outright what I thought of as Quaker 'niceness'. Pretty soon I turned my attention to God and rejected him too.

Years went by of cheerful atheism, although I took my children to Meeting whenever we returned to Jordans and sent the elder two to Saffron Walden school. They have become active Quakers today.

My life changed direction when I was in my thirties. A strange transforming experience, one that came out of the blue, broke through my atheism and forced me to look at life with different eyes. I started searching for an understanding and when I came across some Buddhist quotations I related to them immediately as they seemed to describe what had happened.

So I set about studying Buddhism. I went to the Buddhist Society in London, attended courses, met some interesting eminent Buddhists (Alan Watts, some Zen masters, Trevor Leggett) and discovered a very satisfying and profound teaching which led me to a lifelong study of Buddhism, helped by work on the early texts with a Pali-speaking lecturer.

I have now, late in life, come back to the Jordans atmosphere of my childhood in that I have bought a flat in a Quaker sheltered housing complex and attend Meeting regularly. I remain deeply committed to

Buddhist teaching and understanding but am conscious too of the old affection I have for Friends, for their scruples and concerns and the dilemmas they come up against in their search for integrity.

GEORGE FOX (1624-1691) AND THE BUDDHA (563 BCE)

Although an immense distance in time and space separates these two men, nevertheless it is possible to find some similarities in their lives. Both the similarities and the differences can pinpoint the essential teaching of each. It is a good idea to start with this comparison because it gives us the foundation for all that has occurred since. These are the original voices, the inspiration behind the great movements which followed. These two - the preacher and the teacher - can tell us what we want to find out about the beginnings.

The first thing we need to see clearly is that both Fox and the Buddha were ordinary human beings. Fox stands out as the brave and authoritative voice of a totally convinced person, whether right or wrong. And whatever future generations were to make of the Buddha, he himself refused to regard his persona as anything other than that of a teacher, constantly exhorting his followers to use their critical judgement.

'Accept my words only when you have examined them for yourselves; do not accept them simply because of the reverence you have for me. Those who only have faith in me and affection for me will not find the final freedom. But those who have faith in the truth and are determined on the path, they will find awakening.

It is as well to remember that for most of his life Fox was concerned with a pure Christianity and not with anything labelled 'Quaker'. As we know, he much preferred the word 'Friend'. In the same way, during the Buddha's lifetime and for many centuries afterwards there was no such thing as 'Buddhism'. The Buddha himself was a follower of the *Dharma* (the truth) and his disciples would have been given the same title.

The Evidence

Fortunately for Quakers, George Fox was a prodigious writer and has left a wealth of diary entries and journals and letters. There are also the accounts of him by his contemporaries, so the material is almost overwhelmingly profuse.

In contrast, the Buddha lived at a time when writing, although established, was very uncommon - particularly so in rural India where writing materials were almost nonexistent. Palm leaves were occasionally inscribed (and have been recovered) and the Emperor Ashoka who lived some 200 years after the Buddha, had the Buddha's sayings carved into stone. The written and classical language of the time was Sanskrit but the language people spoke was Pali, in various dialects.

The common practice was to memorise rather than to write and this was successful not only in India but in Celtic Europe too. The teachings were passed down in this way, although word for word would be making too big an assumption.

The Background

Fox was nineteen when he left home. He came from a close family who enjoyed moderate comfort and settled harmony. He was well educated, particularly with regard to the Bible, and had a passionate concern for the truth in all things. One of his neighbours said of him, "If George says 'Verily' there is no altering him." It was this deep sense of an underlying truth that led him to search for the reality in Christianity.

This was a time when science and religion were starting to go their different ways. The discovery of Newton's cosmos and of Copernicus' recognition that the world is not the fixed centre of the universe (we too are on the move) was to make the physical locations of heaven and hell implausible and there began to arise a double-truth world where reason and faith came to be seen as belonging to different realms.

Religion was increasingly seen as relevant more to the inner self than to the outer world. Christianity was still believed in by most people and, perhaps as a reaction against the mechanical-sounding views of science, a host of fervently religious movements began in the 17th and 18th centuries all over Europe.

Fox would have known of these. He felt passionately about Christianity and as a young man knew a great urge to go forth and talk to other Christians and ministers. The actual spur which impelled him to leave home is believed to have been a sense of shock and disgust when he was invited to join some young friends and relations in a drinking session. It was perhaps his acute sense of balance which led him to see something repellent in others deliberately losing theirs.

The Buddha came from an extensive tribal family called the Shakyas. The Shakyas were rulers of a small kingdom in North India, close to the Himalayas. His own name was Siddhartha Gautama and his background was one of moderate wealth and social standing. Legends describe him as a prince living in a palace but there were no palaces at that time in India and the term prince is too grand - although it is true that in years to come he conversed with other Indian rulers on equal terms.

His youth would have included a good education in the Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. His life as a young man was the privileged one of a rather pampered only son. He was married in his teens and was the father of a son before, like Fox, he became disillusioned with the drinking and revelry around him and left it all behind, setting off to look for a deeper meaning in life.

OPENINGS AND AWAKENING

Awakening

"When I was a young man, at the beginning of my life, I looked at nature and saw that all things are subject to decay and death and thus to sorrow. The thought came to me that I myself was of such a nature. I too would be subject to disease, decay, death, and sorrow. But what if I were to search for that which underlies all becoming, for the unsurpassed perfect security which is nirvana, the perfect freedom of the unconditioned state?"

This was what filled Siddhartha's mind when he left his father's court and went into the forests as a *sannyasin* - a renunciate who gives up all worldly goods in order to search for the meaning of life. It was not an unusual step for him to take. *Sannyasins* have always existed in India and still do. In the forests which covered much of northern India, Siddhartha found many groups of yogins and ascetics and at first he eagerly sought their teaching. But after some six years, he realised that the truth was not going to come from outside, through the lips of another. One night, it is said, he sat down beneath a tree and vowed not to move again until he had found what he was looking for.

Many legends surround this moment - that Mara, the devil, offered him this world and when he refused it reigned down lightning and thunderbolts which were turned into flowers as they reached him - and a host of other unlikely events.

But as he meditated and contemplated, struggling to penetrate the causes of suffering and to understand the ground of his own mind, he found all his efforts were in vain. At last, he simply gave up. At the same time he abandoned his ascetic life style and took some nourishing food.

It is said he then felt as though a profound change was coming over him. We are told that he sat through the darkness until the first glimpse of the morning star suddenly brought about a supreme state of clarity

and understanding. 'Unexcelled, complete awakening' was how he described it.

'All the conditions of the world came into my mind, one after another, and as they came they were penetrated and put down. In this way, finally, a knowledge and insight arose, and I knew this was the changeless, the unconditioned. This was freedom'.

'The reality that came to me is profound and hard to see or understand because it is beyond the sphere of thinking. Most people fail to see this reality, for they are attached to what they cling to, to pleasures and delights. Since all the world is so attached to material things, it's very difficult for people to grasp how everything originates in conditions and causes. It's hard for them to see the meaning of the fact that everything, including ourselves, depends on everything else and has no permanent self-existence.'

Westerners, especially Christians, find that sort of statement difficult to understand because we nurture our sense of self and it is very strong. But after his great insight, the Buddha ('Buddha' is a title meaning 'The Awakened One') stated that there is no unchanging, immortal self or soul. The Buddha took it as a premise that all things are in a process of continual change, including the self.

If we look, we can see that we create a feeling, an image of who we are - in fact, we are constantly creating ourselves. This understanding is accepted by both western psychology and Buddhism equally. Both recognise that what we call my 'self' is constructed out of our situation and kept going for a lifetime. But whereas in the West, we value this creation of a self, Buddhism goes a step further and says it is this same self that we must finally go beyond. There is a 'beyond' and it is this last state that Buddhism is concerned with - another state of consciousness. In this way, Buddhism invites us to discover who we most truly are.

In the days that followed his awakening, the Buddha was perplexed. He felt his eyes had been opened in such a way that he should make it known and teach it. But at the same time, the content of what he would teach was so difficult to convey that he wondered if he should attempt

it or if it would just lead to endless scorn and confusion.

'But then it came to me as an insight that I should teach the truth, for it is also happiness. There are people whose sight is only a little clouded, and they are suffering through not hearing the reality. They would become knowers of the truth.

'It was in this way that I went forth to teach.

His first discourse was a setting down of his new understanding. The Buddha was not a philosopher and he was not concerned with original causes in the sense of a creator, or whether the world was a natural event or not, and he often reproved his followers for what he considered pointless speculation. What deeply concerned him was how the world was at that particular moment, the actual case of what was going on. So when he talked of 'conditions' and 'causes' he meant his great insight that everything is contingent, is interdependent and interrelated. No thing can exist on its own. Each of us is an inextricable and vital part of the whole. We are entirely necessary.

'There is a meditation called the meditation on the miraculousness of existence. Existence means being in the present. 'The miraculousness of existence' means to be aware that the universe is contained in each thing, and that the universe could not exist if it did not contain each thing. This awareness of interconnectedness, interpenetration, and interbeing makes it impossible for us to say something 'is' or 'is not', so we call it 'miraculous existence.' (Thich Nhat Hahn, Buddhist monk)

The Buddha's first discourse, which contained the basis of all his further teaching, came to be called 'The Four Noble Truths'. It took the traditional Vedic form of a doctor's diagnosis - the acknowledgement of the illness; the understanding of its cause; the pronouncement as to whether it is curable; and the prescription for the remedy. In this discourse he outlined the reasons, as he saw it, of why we suffer and what is the cure.

The first Truth is concerned with suffering as such, although 'suffering' is a dodgy translation of the Pali word *dukkha*. It encompasses the lot, from real pain to dissatisfaction. It is difficult to

find another word so I will continue to use it, but it contains a multitude of gradations.

'Birth is *dukkha*, decay is *dukkha*, sickness is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, so also are sorrow and grief... To be bound with things which we dislike, and to be parted from things which we like, these also are *dukkha*. Not to get what one desires, this also is *dukkha*. In a word, this body, this existence based on clutching, this is *dukkha*.

It is this clutching which is the basis of the second Truth. We cling to things through ignorance or unconsciousness. The Pali term is *avidya* and *avidya* is the opposite of awakening. It is the state of mind we fall into when we are spellbound by the myriad things in the world about us. When we lose the reality of the whole and are bewitched into perpetually grasping the things of the world. The greed for money is a good example. So too is the egocentric attempt to dominate the world, to bring as much of the world as possible under the control of the self.

The third Truth is concerned with ending self-frustration and the whole vicious circular pattern of grasping. The ending is called *nirvana*, of which there is no simple translation at all. It is often called liberation. Seen from one angle it is despair - that life always defeats our efforts to control it, that all human striving seems little more than a clutching at the air. But seen from another angle, this despair breaks into joy and creative power when it becomes apparent that to lose one's life is to find it. When one stops binding oneself to the self's demands and reactions and turns instead to the freedom of responsiveness to the world².

The fourth Truth is the necessary prescription the Buddha advises for the attaining of this freedom. It is called the Eightfold Path and will be described under the section concerned with Teaching.

Openings

'About the beginning of the year 1646, as I was going to Coventry and approaching towards the gate, a consideration arose in me, how it was said that 'all Christians are believers, both protestants and papists';

and the Lord opened to me that, if all were believers, then they were all born of God, and passed from death to life, and that none were true believers but such; and though others said they were believers they were not.

At another time, as I was walking in a field on a first-day morning, the Lord opened to me 'that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ'; and I wondered at it, because it was the common belief of people. But I saw it clearly as the Lord opened it to me, and was satisfied, and admired the goodness of the Lord who had opened this unto me this morning.

Another time it was opened to me 'That God who made the world, did not dwell in temples made by hands'. This at first seemed a strange word, because both priests and people used to call their temples and churches dreadful places, holy ground, and the temples of God. But the Lord showed me clearly that he did not dwell in these temples which men had commended and set up, but in people's hearts ...'

These revelations did not come to George Fox without a lot of inward searching. Just as the Buddha had to leave all familiarity behind and spend some years looking for he knew not what, so Fox 'broke off all familiarity with relations and fellowship with young and old'. He travelled through the country, ignoring those ministers who were interested in him, and, in this isolation, felt himself becoming thoroughly miserable.

'... a strong temptation to despair came over me. Then I saw how Christ was tempted, and the mighty troubles I was in; sometimes I kept myself retired in my chamber, and often walked solitary in the Chase there, to wait upon the Lord. I wondered why these things should come to me; and I looked upon myself and said 'Was I ever so before?' Then I thought because I had forsaken my relations I had done amiss against them; so I was brought to call to mind my time that I had spent, and to consider whether I had wronged any. But temptations grew more and more, and I was tempted almost to despair; and when Satan could not effect his desire upon me that way, he laid snares for me, and baits to draw me to commit some sin, whereby he could take advantage to bring

me to despair. I was about twenty years of age when these exercises came upon me. I continued in that condition some years, in great trouble, and fain would have put it from me. I went to many a priest to look for comfort, but found no comfort from them.

'And when my hope in them and all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly left to me, nor could I tell what to do, oh then I heard a voice which said: 'There is one even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.

Two troubled young men, George Fox and Siddhartha, both aware for some years that there was some dimension of being they had not yet found and both eagerly searching for it. In Siddhartha's case, the teachers he went to in the forest were unable to enlighten him; in Fox's case it was the ministers he turned to who could give him no help. And yet both men, when they finally acknowledged defeat discovered, in that moment, what they were looking for.

George Fox was to continue to have openings, sometimes accompanied by visions. They are described in the Biblical language of his age - an age in Europe which was full of revelations and discernments and visions - and do not sit very comfortably with a modern outlook. Nevertheless, they reveal the ardour of his love of God and were undoubtedly what stirred the many audiences he spoke to:

'Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword, into the paradise of God. All things were new and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness and innocence and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Jesus Christ; so that I say that I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me, and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and purpose. I was at a stand in my mind, whether I should practice physic for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtues of things were so opened to me by the Lord. But I was immediately taken up in spirit to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's innocence, even into a

state in Christ Jesus that should never fail. And the Lord showed me that such as were faithful to him, in the power and light of Christ, should come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell; in which admirable works of creation and the virtues thereof may be known, through the openings of the divine wisdom and power by which they were made.

Great things did the Lord lead me into, and wonderful depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared. But as people come into subjection to the spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the almighty, they may receive the word of wisdom that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the eternal being.

Perhaps one of Fox's most profound openings was that which concerned the inward Light. It was made clear to him that: 'Now the Lord God hath opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all.

This understanding that the Light of God is within every person is one which has become the hallmark of Friends and has inspired their work in society ever since.

COMMENT

It is clear that however similar their initial longings and searchings, there is one big difference in their understanding between George Fox and the Buddha. For Fox, the Light and the words that were revealed to him from God, were an outer phenomenon that entered into him in a similar way to St. Paul's experience, which he describes in a letter to the Galatians - 'The Gospel you hear me preach is not of human origin. No man taught it to me. I received it through a revelation from Jesus Christ. This was also the core of Fox's belief. The Light that shone into him and into all people was not an inherent part of humanity but came from without. This is the particular understanding of Christianity; that all purpose and morality have their source in a divinity outside of the

human being. It was Fox's genius to see that the 'divine light of Christ' shines into any and all when they are 'opened' and is thus at all times available to the human being.

Thus Fox's belief was a new and profound variation on conventional Christianity with its unbridgeable divide between human and divine. Fox could now turn to the world and tell it that there was no need for intermediaries, for priests or churches, because the Light was there for each opened individual. However, it appears to have no correspondence with the very different realisations of the Buddha.

People often asked the Buddha whether he believed in the Hindu pantheon of deities (a trinity, as in Christianity). In answer to this question he was usually silent because he believed that whatever answer he gave would lead to the wrong set of concepts. But when a monk came to him and said: 'You have not told us whether the world is eternal or not, whether the soul is the same as the body, or whether the self exists after death,' he did reply. He said: 'Suppose a man were wounded by an arrow and when the surgeon arrived, he said to him, 'Don't pull out this arrow until I know who shot it, what tree it comes from, who made it, and what kind of bow was used, that man would certainly die before he received the answers. To be a follower of the truth does not depend on any such answers. Whether the world is eternal or transient, there is suffering, and I teach the way to understand it. My teaching does not depend on whether I exist after death or not, because I am concerned with suffering here and now'.

Hence the Buddha's attitude was always one of discovering what was there and not one of believing. 'Thus with the right wisdom he sees it as it is' is one of his sayings. Also, with reference to his own awakening, he said: 'The eye was born, knowledge was born, wisdom was born, science was born, light was born.' It is always by knowing through knowledge or wisdom and not accepting because of faith. Belief, he said, arises only when there is no seeing. But as soon as you see, there is no need for belief.

Yet this in no way invalidates Fox's revelation. Such a revelation was simply not in the Buddha's programme. We can be sure, though,

that as far as it created wisdom and compassion, the Buddha would have believed it to be exactly appropriate to Fox's day and age.

MINISTRY AND TEACHING

Ministry

When George Fox was in misery because there was none among the clergy who could 'speak to his condition' the direct experience of Christ speaking to him transformed his understanding, giving him total reassurance that he was being answered. The experience of revelation showed him that this was not something to be added to a Christian life but replaced it altogether. It gave spiritual authority not just to himself but to all who shared in the experience. In this way, the scripture of the Bible was secondary to the revelation, the Living Word, the inward experience.

So his ministry was to speak to everyone of this direct voice of the Teacher, of the transformation that would enter their souls when they opened themselves to the inward Light. For him and for those who followed him, it meant a particular feeling of closeness to God and Christ. They were intimately available to those who were 'opened'.

It also meant for his followers a sense of being transformed into a new sphere, one that was separate from the old 'sinful' self and separate too from the rest of 'corrupt' humanity. They called themselves saints, or 'Friends of Truth' or 'Children of the Light' and knew themselves to be distinct from the ordinary unopened world.

This might have resulted in such a small and precious group that Quakers would have ended there and then. But at that time there was a widespread movement throughout the country for a radical new understanding of the scriptures, rather than the one delivered by the Church, and there were plenty of people eager to listen to an unconventional preacher. The new technique of mass printing had brought in a revolutionary era of information; pamphlets and tracts

were being studied all over the country. There was a rebellious feeling that everyone could read the Bible for themselves and need not rely any more on the priests. It was a mood that fitted Fox perfectly.

In particular, he found support among the Seekers. The Seekers were a group who had separated themselves from the Church and had stripped their worship of formality and ritual. They had ministers but waited in silence until the minister spoke. Many early Quaker leaders were drawn from their numbers. The Seekers were awaiting the Second Coming. Fox too believed that the Second Coming was near and that it was an inward experience for which all Friends should await in expectancy. He became what was then called an itinerant preacher, journeying all over the country with his message, and members of the Seekers were some of his enthusiastic supporters. They tended to congregate in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Westmoreland and it was here, on Pendle Hill, that Fox had a vision of a 'great people to be gathered, dressed in white raiment.' Soon afterwards he attracted many hundreds to a meeting and it became apparent that a new Church (the name given to it at the time) had been started

It is important to remember that there was no 'Quaker message' as such from Fox. It was the message of Christ which concerned him and filled him and which he believed would come into the hearts and minds of Friends. He took the words of the Apostles in a direct way, setting aside all the traditional authorities. The 'experimental truth' which then welled up in him was his touchstone.

The Apostles were the 'messengers' and so too were the travelling ministers of the Children of Light, which included himself. He, and they, were sent to bring the message of the 'Word of Truth'. It is in this way that early Quakers saw themselves and Fox's letters remind us again and again of how important such a sense of carrying the message and living in the Light was.

Divine power was to be found in all men and women and the two phrases he used to convey this realisation were: 'that of God in every man' and 'the Light of Christ within.' The Inward Light was never used as a power of itself. It was that part of the human being which

links them with the creative power of Christ.

'Friends,

The love of God is to you; the springs are opening, and the plants are refreshing with the living waters. Now Friends, walk in the Truth, as ye have received it. Which Light walking in, it will bring you to receive Christ, from whence it comes. Here is the way to salvation, and as many as receive him, to them he gives power to become the sons of God. And the Son of God is but one in all, male and female; and the Light of God is but one. So all walk in it, to receive the Son; in which Light is the unity which brings to fellowship with the Father and the Son. And the Oneness is in the Light, as the Father and the Son is one, and brings you to where he is, out of the world, from the world. Therefore walk in the Light.

'This is the Word, which makes all clean, which is received in the heart, and this is the word of faith which we preach. Therefore I charge you in the presence of the living God to wait in the Light, which comes from Christ, that with it ye may receive the Life; that with the Light and Life, which is one, ye may come to have the Scriptures opened to you.'

And so he dismissed the theological Christianity of his day in favour of the purely experiential. No priests were needed because the encounter with Christ was inward and direct. This was the essence of the Second Coming and it was here to be experienced at any time, not just on holy days such as Sundays or Christmas or Easter. And because the encounter with God and the resulting transformation could take place anywhere, there were no specially ordained places to meet and worship - a house or a barn was adequate at the beginning and it was only when the movement grew that a 'Meeting House' was arranged for the increased numbers.

The years of Fox's ministry are well known to Quakers. Some strong voices joined the movement, people such as Edward Burrough and James Naylor and Judge Fell and his wife Margaret (whom, as a widow, Fox was later to marry). The Quakers, named after their tendency to quake as they waited for the word of God, were becoming

a steady, strong group. They were much persecuted by the authorities for the various principles Fox had instilled, and many suffered years in prison, as did Fox himself, for what nowadays seem trivial offences, such as refusing to bow to any social hierarchy, so that a Lord would not be called a Lord and a Quaker would not doff his cap to any gentry. The refusal to pay church tithes was a more serious offence made worse by the refusal, when taken to court, to swear an oath. Instead, a Friend would often take the opportunity to preach a sermon in court.

Silence was the medium Fox advised for the awaiting of revelation. In this silence Friends would feel the presence of God and would 'minister' accordingly, sometimes preaching at some length. For a number of years, Quakers were regarded with such suspicion for their silent Meetings by the all-powerful Church authorities that they were forbidden to meet together above the number of four. But in 1689, two years before Fox died, the Act of Toleration ended the persecution.

Most Friends today will know some or all of these facts about Fox and the first Quakers. But perhaps not so many will know the essence of the Buddha's teaching and how it compares to revelation. So, without more ado, I shall now continue with that enquiry.

The Buddha's Teaching

'All that we are is the result of our thoughts; it is founded on our thoughts and made up of our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world.'

After his awakening the Buddha was deeply conscious not only of the transient and contingent nature of life which causes us to cling so strongly to the familiar, but also of how a sense of integration with this very transiency can bring unexpected fulfilment and happiness.

Hence - 'With our thoughts we make the world'. It is not that we create the physical world but that our interpretation of it makes it what it is to us. Out of the fundamentals, we each create our own world. He believed that when this is seen clearly, we can come to terms with who and what we are in an appropriate way. We can lose the constricting

sense of 'I', with all its demands, and take part in a life full of awareness of its wonders.

'To learn about oneself is to forget oneself. To forget oneself is to be enlightened by everything in the world.' (Dogen, a Zen priest)

The Buddha also saw that while both physical and mental existence can be explained by causes and conditions (he was an early Darwinian) we are not, as this might imply, robots. We have the ability, if we want to use it, to tune into a new way of living - a way which, like Fox in his time, he believed to be available to all beings. He felt that there was an error of understanding, that the core apprehension of the mystery of existence had been swamped by clinging to an isolated self that could no longer feel wholeness and belonging. This wrong identification with self all too often brought about actions based on envy, greed, hatred and delusion.

But, he said, as soon as we wake up to the fact that the world we have become used to is changing, and begin to look at what our choices are, we are responding to the call to consciousness. So the Eightfold Path describes the different ways we can follow to break free of our fixed patterns of behaviour and begin to investigate what is really here. To understand the self as what one does, rather than what one is. The Path formed the basis of the Buddha's discourses for the rest of his long life. He famously gave this teaching for 'the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world.' Its basis was these points:

- How we should see the world as it comes to be in each moment rather than as what we think, hope or fear it is.
- How we should base our actions on reality rather than on the longing and loathing of our hearts and minds.
- How we should live lives that are wise, compassionate and in tune with reality.
- How we can find the experience of being awake.

In his day the Buddha saw people without purpose or meaning in their lives, as we see many today. He believed that if they could achieve a balanced and harmonious inner life, they would not see

themselves as the victims of circumstance and they would then be of benefit both to themselves and to the wider community. He recognised that there is a thirst for life in all people but many search in the wrong places to satisfy this thirst and this brings about a restless desire that is the opposite of real happiness.

So he urged people not to blindly follow traditions, reports, hearsay, opinions, speculation, or the authority of religious texts but to see and know for themselves what is true - and when they did, to take it up. He also urged people to see and know for themselves what is hurtful and divisive - and to give that up. The emphasis was always on seeing and knowing rather than on thinking or believing.

Above all, he wanted people to understand that they always have a choice. He wanted them to work out for themselves when they were pursuing an unwise course because he wanted them to experience a natural morality, not one that is imposed from outside. It should be based on the understanding that arises from seeing the results of actions. Then the choice to follow this way rather than that would be a conscious and informed one.

The eight steps of the Eightfold Path are usually grouped in three sections:

Clear Understanding
Right thinking

Good speech
Appropriate action
Proper livelihood

True effort
Attentive mindfulness
Deep concentration

The way they are listed does not mean they have to be followed sequentially - they arise together. They cover most of human life and

are a means of taking responsibility for the way you live your life.

They lead to insight into one's fundamental nature, said the Buddha, and they bring about four sublime states - benevolence, compassion, joyous sympathy with the good fortune of others, and equanimity. 'Be not afraid of good actions, brethren. It is another name for happiness, for what is desired, dear and delightful - this word 'good actions'.

When the Buddha set out to teach he became aware that the society around him was full of deep divisions. There were frequent wars between petty chiefs and rival clans. The caste system, which still exists today, was dominating society. Religious insight, which has always underpinned Indian life, was being choked by the Brahmins (the priestly caste) who taught the Vedas as authoritative texts to be obeyed, rather than as living truths to be explored. A miasma of discouraged fatalism had settled on the majority of Hindus who, believing in reincarnation, saw no hope of release from the eternal round of birth and death. Nothing vexed the Buddha more than the way in which the Brahmins had turned themselves into a privileged caste by keeping the most valuable teachings back from the people and holding them as secret, powerful possessions.

Men and women were being misled. Their poignant immediate needs were being ignored in favour of distant heavens and they were not being shown a much more dependable source of happiness. The Buddha saw it as his task to clear away these binding entanglements and to enable people to break through to a more lasting solution to their problems and in this way to bring to India a method of living which was full of freedom and love. As Martin Luther opposed the hypocrisy of the priests who sold indulgences, so the Buddha broke the hold of the Brahmins by teaching a way of life which was devoid of authority and which relied in the individual to tread the path by his or her own power. It was a religion in which there was no speculation. 'If it's outside your experience, don't believe in it. Check everything against your own experience', he often said.

His dedication to the good of all brought him the trust of many people. Beggars and outcasts could go to him knowing that they would

be welcomed with unfailing and indiscriminating friendliness. At the same time, the Buddha was trusted by kings and rulers and asked to adjudicate in disputes. It is claimed by historians that he started, not just a religion, but a civilisation of wisdom and compassion, and these two qualities are the ones that Buddhists attempt to cultivate more than any. The real meaning of compassion, to him, was not pity as such, but the dethroning of the self from the centre of the world and putting others there in its place. In this way, enlightenment could be achieved as much through compassion as through wisdom.

He was, of course, often asked questions. One that arose frequently was to do with the nature of the self because people found this particular aspect of the teaching very hard to understand - as many people still do today. Was there a self or wasn't there? One of the Buddha's answers was this:

'Just as the word chariot is a means of expressing how axle, body, wheel and poles are brought together in a certain relationship, but when we look at each of them one by one there is no chariot in an absolute sense; in exactly the same way the words living entity and person are but ways of expressing the relationship of body, feeling, and consciousness, but when we come to examine the elements of being, one by one, we find there is no permanent entity there. In the absolute sense there is only name and form and the mystery which they express. Such ideas as 'I' and 'I am' are not absolute.'

We structure reality through language and then believe in the structure, he said. But the imposing of a name on what is thought to be a thing or a state, divides it from other things and other states. But when you pursue what lies behind the name you find those divisions increasingly meaningless. What is revealed is the sublime depth, mystery and contingency of anything that seems to exist in self-sufficient isolation.

See the self as a mirage, the Buddha said. A mirage looks absolutely real, and so does the self. It is not that the self does not seem real. It does. Thoughts seem real, we seem real to each other and our lives seem real. But we can at the same time recognise that it is a passing

state, a mirage. He believed that when we recognise the world in this way, something changes in us. We can then live without fear, while still treasuring each amazing moment. Blake has summed it up in a way that westerners can relate to more easily:

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.

The Buddha intended his teaching to be used as a psychological tool to free people from their fixations, the fixations that lock them into a life of painful alienation. The practice he began - one which has continued as the backbone of Buddhism to the present day - was meditation. The true translation of *dhyana*, the Pali word for meditation, is cultivation, the cultivation of awareness. It was a tool for freeing the mind from its perpetual chatter and bringing it to a state of clarity. As well, it was a way by which people could send out waves of benevolence to all the four corners of the earth, not omitting a single creature.

Arouse your will, supreme and great,
Practice love, give joy and protection;
Let your giving be like space,
Without discrimination or limitation.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Quaker Energy and Purpose

The 'plain' life of Quakers persisted throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Plain dress, plain houses, plain food and little music. In this way, they believed themselves to be 'harmless and innocent' according

to Margaret Fell. A pacifist approach to war was entirely appropriate to their condition and in the 17th century the Peace Testimony was created and adopted by all Friends, in America as well as England.

Many were attracted to the Quaker lifestyle. They were brought into the movement by missionary Quakers who travelled the country in pairs as itinerant teachers, both men and women. They taught of the inward experience of God which needed no spiritual hierarchy or ministers. Such radical teaching had been heard before from other earlier movements, such as the Beghards and the Brethren of the Free Spirit and the Friends of God, but those were sometimes accompanied by an 'anything goes morally' approach, while the Quakers followed a strictly ethical line.

They began to teach a doctrine of 'perfection' and aroused much antagonism by their appropriation of this claim. But too many troublesome questions arose from aspiring to 'perfection' and Friends had to compromise. They came to see that each person received a different 'measure' of the Inward Light and all that was needed was to live up to that measure. The practice was then established that all individual experiences should be tested by the community - a practice which has lasted to the present day.

But nevertheless, new revelations did continue and led to schisms about practice. It was decided the way out must be through increased formalisation. Local Meetings, Monthly Meetings, Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meetings were all established and energy shifted from mission to administration. Other rules sprang up. Quakers could marry only other Quakers and by the 18th century music, reading, and the theatre were all considered inappropriate to the spiritual life. Breaking of these rules could lead to 'disownment'.

Such rigidity was an attempt by Friends to separate themselves from a corrupt world and to remember that they were a 'peculiar' people. But their nonconformity had the effect of banishment from universities, the professions and from Parliament. So they put their inventive powers into business and trade. Shoes, iron, chocolate and banking all bear their names to this day.

In the 19th century trouble began in America between Evangelical Revival Friends who wanted greater emphasis laid on scripture, and those who believed in the inward experience to such an extent that they resisted scriptural teachings altogether. The schism spread to England where the Quaker Evangelicals announced that the Inward Light was delusional.

The uncertain role of the Inward Light led to more schisms as the century progressed. To the outside world this might have been unnoticeable, for all Friends still worshipped in silence in Meeting Houses and dressed and spoke in the distinctive Quaker way. But, internally, battle after battle was being conducted.

In Britain, membership drastically declined in the 1850s and a period of the 'doldrums' set in. Alarmed, Friends decided to abandon some 'peculiarities'. Marrying out came to be allowed in some circumstances; and the fact that other Christian sects had apparently not suffered for dressing and speaking normally was noted and dress became optional.

By the end of the nineteenth century a liberal approach had led to a re-visioning of Quakerism in both America and England. This transformed the whole movement and brought back, at last, its spiritual roots.

'The Lord of heaven and earth we found to be near at hand, and, as we waited upon him in pure silence, our mind out of all things, His heavenly presence appeared in our assemblies, when there was no language, tongue, nor speech from any creature. The kingdom of heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net, and His heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement, and great admiration, insomuch as we often said unto one another, with great joy of heart: 'What, is the kingdom of God come to be with men? 1895 (*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 19.08)

The Flow of Buddhism

For the first two hundred years after the Buddha died, the Buddhist community seems to have been just one among many groups of wandering *sannyasins*. But then, in much the same way as the Roman Emperor Constantine announced Jesus to be a deity and adopted Christianity as the official creed of the Roman empire, so the Emperor Ashoka of India heard the Buddha's teaching, adopted Buddhism, and it was fully launched. Almost overnight it became a strong religious force which began to expand far beyond the borders of India. Many Asian countries accepted it and it had a remarkable capacity to cross cultural frontiers and then adapt to the needs of new situations. It picked up local gods without trouble and succeeded in generating an extraordinary diversity of forms. Listen to a Theravada monk from Sri Lanka, a Pure Land priest from Japan or a lama from Tibet and you might be hard pressed to understand what unites them as 'Buddhist'.

But the different traditions resemble each other much in the same way as the members of a family do. For a tradition to be accepted as Buddhist does not require that it comply with a definition of what Buddhism essentially is, any more than to be accepted as a member of the Smith family does not require complete identification with 'Smithness'.

Such a historically nonessentialist view emphasised that Buddhism was a dynamic cultural process unfolding over time rather than a fixed body of ideas and practices that was preserved without change. As a cultural movement Buddhism has survived and will survive not by holding on to some hypothetical essence but by freely and creatively inventing itself in response to changing circumstances.

This happened, for instance, when Buddhism made its way along the silk route into China during the second century CE. The Taoists thought it was a form of Taoism and welcomed it. By the time of the Emperor Wu in the sixth century it was well established and he was proud of all he had done for it. But then a new form of Buddhism began which was to have a long life.

It started with the arrival at the Emperor's court of a renowned Indian Buddhist monk, Bodhidharma. The Emperor, aware of this monk's status and expecting to be admired for his own missionary work, gave him an audience.

He asked Bodhidharma: 'We have built temples, copied holy scriptures, ordered monks and nuns to be converted. Is there any merit, Reverend Sir, in our conduct?'

'No merit at all.'

The Emperor, taken aback, thought that such an answer was upsetting the whole teaching, and enquired again:

'What, then, is the holy truth, the first principle?'

'In vast emptiness there is nothing holy. ['Holy' is a human concept.]

'Who, then, are you to stand before me?'

'I know not, your Majesty.' [who, indeed, are we, emerging from the mystery of existence?]

This exchange is reputedly the beginning of Ch'an Buddhism which later, when it went to Japan in the 12th century, became known as Zen.

The Buddha is often called the 'Awakened One' and the methods of Zen are designed to wake you up by snapping you out of your logical, abstract frame of mind and opening your eyes to the immediacy of experience. It does this in various ways, one of which is the asking of questions which can't be answered by the conceptual mind. For instance - 'At this very moment tell me what was your original face before your father and mother were born?'

And in a sentence which perhaps sums up the whole of the Buddha's teaching as well as his own, the Zen master Rinzai said: 'I have no doctrine to give people - I just cure ailments and unlock fetters.'

Zen has become a popular teaching, particularly in America. But it is not for everybody and some people prefer the more ritualistic and dramatic Tibetan Buddhism, with its strong emphasis on compassion. Buddhism reached Tibet in about 500 CE and replaced the shamanic and fiercely hostile Bon religion. Buddhism inherited a number of Bon

deities, mostly wrathful, and turned them into inwardly compassionate but fierce-looking protectors of the faith. The practitioners of Buddhism had come from the Indian university of Nalanda, where the emphasis was on altruism and wisdom and a very complex but fine branch of Buddhism was established under their guidance.

But when the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950, followed by a Tibetan uprising in 1959, many lamas had to escape and a number came to the west. They brought with them the teaching which says that each of us is capable of developing supreme compassion according to his or her level of realisation - which depends on previous lives as well as this one. For Tibetans reincarnation is very important.

The lamas are said to have great powers, both magical and spiritual. Perhaps some have. The rigours of their training would leave most of us considerably changed from our ordinary workaday selves. Most spend several years in isolated hermitages, in almost unbroken solitude. Before this, there are years of deep meditation and ritual chanting. There are initiations, none of which can be given until the aspirant has made a hundred thousand prostrations.

Yet such privations seem to have resulted in monks who are outgoing and full of kindness and humour. The Dalai Lama is an outstanding example. This Buddhism is more obviously devotional than the elliptical Zen and Christians find it easier to understand. There are strong links between lamas and Roman Catholic monks and the two aims of Tibetan Buddhism, altruism and the realisation of impermanence, sit well with a religious community. And too, the maroon and yellow robes, the trumpets and incense and deep chanting, give the right feel of religion to westerners.

Easier too is the third prong of Buddhism in the West; the Theravada monks and nuns from Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka who reach back to the original sannyasins and have renounced worldly goods. Theravada is an early form of Buddhism in which the monastery is the centre of the village, giving education and advice and receiving in return the daily needs of the monks. Theravada has always kept a quiet profile in the West but is an excellent resource for meditation and

basic Buddhism.

'This is the path, just this state of attention. Not anything that I'm creating and not attention like 'achtung!', it's more of a relaxed attention. Listening, open, receptive. When you relax into that, it's a natural state. It's not a created state, It's not dependent on conditions making it that way. When we get carried away we can come back again and again, and it's all right. This is the refuge.' Ajahn Sumedho, Theravadan monk.

QUAKERS AND BUDDHISTS TODAY

Many Friends combine Buddhist practices with a Quaker way of life and perhaps this is the key to the 'cousinship' which people feel when they know about the two paths.

In my title I used the term 'the cutting edge' because it is exactly here - combining the two approaches - that I saw a lack of clarity. For Quakers and Buddhists start off with different concepts and these should be explored and understood. So, with some diffidence, I shall attempt to do so.

When George Fox had his great insight into the nearness and immediacy of Jesus, it must have been a moment of enormous relief apart from anything else. No need for any other intermediary or way of life - it was all here, in the immediate present. No need for any preparation beyond the waiting. That spirit has surely passed down the generations of Quakers as their *raison d'être*, the inspiration of their lives. That it was the innate nature of everybody to receive this direct communication meant that Quakers everywhere should take the world as their concern to bring alive that knowledge, as far as they were able. Jesus as the inspirer meant living in his spirit rather than following beliefs about him.

The Buddha too had his moment of huge relief but for different reasons, when he could see that his search was over and that the main cause of suffering was a person's belief in a fixed and unchanging self around which the world revolved. To look at the self and see its

temporary nature, its interrelationship with all that existed, seemed to him as much a necessity to reveal to the world as Fox did his relationship with Jesus. 'When you find freedom [from self-centredness],' the Buddha said, 'happiness will arise. Your mind and your body will become tranquil and you will know delight. Because you are happy your mind will concentrate easily; and being concentrated, you will see things as they really are. In so seeing, you will become aware that life is a miracle beyond name and form, and beyond the world and all its living beings.'

Just as George Fox lived at a time of civil and religious upheaval, so did the Buddha. India was on the brink of turning itself into one nation but this future state was bitterly opposed by the rulers of small 'kingdoms'. The Buddha fits into what is known as the Axial Age. In a recent book, Karen Armstrong points out that at the time of the Buddha, which was also that of Plato, Confucius, Lao Tzu and others, there was an upwelling of insight, during which the world began to turn away from the violence and barbarity of tribes and sects and tyrannical rulers. Rather than establishing religious institutions, teachers such as the Buddha created social movements that addressed human suffering.

Armstrong says: 'The Axial sages' objective was to create an entirely different kind of human being. All the sages preached a spirituality of empathy and compassion: they insisted people must abandon their egotism and greed, their violence and unkindness.' The spiritual practices that evolved were varied, but all concentrated on focusing and guiding the mind in ways that would gradually and truly change the heart. Enlightenment was not an end - equanimity, kindness and compassion were. A religion was not about accepting certain metaphysical propositions; it was about behaving in a way that changed you.

Bearing in mind these two different viewpoints, George Fox's and the Buddha's, both arising from an interpretation of what they personally discovered, can we find any goal in common? Assuredly, yes. It exists in the basic essential - how we should live our lives. This 'how' encompasses moral, ethical behaviour and our responsibility and

compassion for others. We could perhaps sum it up in 'a wholesome engagement with life.' To the Buddha, the wholesome was beautiful and he advised everyone to become aware of its beauty.

If there was one thing that the Buddha urged more than any other it was investigation into how the mind works. He believed it would lead to the transformation of the person and he devised many ways in which it could be done. It is these practices which Quakers may find closest to their own.

To move away from an unexamined reaction to a responsive and responsible way of living, is surely at the heart of Quaker life and is expressed in many ways in *Quaker Faith and Practice*. Buddhists would add that for them the key to this is mindfulness. Mindfulness, in Buddhism, is a teaching that has a number of dimensions. It is paying real attention, developing a non-judgemental attitude so that we can remain simply present without becoming embedded in events; and finding one's way to an inner stillness in which the chattering of the mind dies down and one can become more aware of things as they are. We have a wonderful capacity, which is to live a conscious life. We can forever discover the world anew if we allow ourselves to cultivate this boundless consciousness. Mindfulness can be like an extra sense. The Buddha called it 'the eye of clarity' which brings sight to everyone.

Quakers have their own meditation and mindfulness in the stillness of a gathered Meeting and the wisdom of Ministry. 'And the end of words is to bring men to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter.' said Isaac Pennington (*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 27.27). Both Friends and Buddhists know silence as the profound medium which takes us to the innermost centre of our being. It is a practice in the widest sense of the word, which needs practising. And not only silence, but stillness. 'Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt find the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms.' George Fox 1658 (*Q F & P* 2:18).

The worldly problems, which Quakers tackle with energy and understanding, can inspire Buddhists. Friends' struggle to put outstanding wrongs to right - and to do so in a way that is peaceful and meditative - is one to be copied by any group. Buddhists have chosen an inner path to development but Quakers have managed to play an outer constructive part in the world without ignoring the inner.

There are as many strands of Quakers as there are of Buddhists and I am likely to tread on someone's toes if I say any more. But I would like to end with something I feel quite strongly about. There are differences between Quakers and Buddhists and these differences should not be papered over in a well-meant attempt at 'oneness' ('all religions are at heart one') but should be looked at directly and celebrated as new insights, leading to a richer and fuller life.

To end with, here is a statement that George Fox and the Buddha might have composed together, although it is actually the Buddha's.

'There are two kinds of happiness. There is that of an uncommitted life of sensual pleasures, and there is that of a committed life, one of going forth to a new consciousness. Of these, the happiness of going forth is greater.'

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BOOKS CONSULTED AND FURTHER READING

The George Fox quotations come from the Quaker books listed but are not confined to any one of them. They can be found in most accounts of George Fox.

The quotations from the Buddha are to be found in my book: *The Buddha Speaks* (now republished under the title: *The Pocket Buddha Reader*) which gives the sources. All of them come from the volumes of the Pali Text translations.

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An e-mail information/discussion group can be found at

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The Quaker Universalist Group

The Quaker Universalist Group is based on the understanding that spiritual awareness is accessible to everyone of any religion or none and that no one can claim to have a final revelation or monopoly of truth. We acknowledge that such awareness may be expressed in many different ways. We delight in this diversity and warmly welcome both Quakers and non-Quakers to join us.

About this pamphlet

Anne Bancroft speaks from a long experience of both Buddhism and Quakerism. She sets the Buddha and George Fox in their respective contexts and traces their spiritual journeys as recorded (voluminously) in the writings of George Fox and his contemporaries, and, from the oral tradition of teaching and as set down in the Pali manuscripts, of the Buddha. Both left home to search for their truths, first through the traditional teachers of their time; but came to realise, after a time of despair and testing, that the path to truth lay with seeking a direct encounter with the sacred within the self. From their revelations and insights developed those 'awakenings' and 'openings' which still speak to our condition today.

Anne explores the similarities of the two paths - their origins at a time of ferment; the personal revelatory experiences which fired their teachings - but also their differences. Many of us have some connection with Buddhism as we encounter it in contemporary Western society and it is enlightening to find a clear exposition of those often glossed-over differences. It is Anne's belief that these differences "should not be papered over in a well-meant attempt at 'oneness' ... but should be looked at directly and celebrated as new insights, leading to a richer and fuller life". In its account of the origins and developments of these two faiths and their meeting points with each other, this pamphlet sets a valuable agenda for further exploration and understanding.

Quaker Universalist Group

QUAKERS AND BUDDHISM

THE CUTTING EDGE

Anne Bancroft



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