



静心学堂丛书

The Mindful Peace Academy Collection

中英双语 Chinese-English Edition

当代宗教信仰 问题的思考

A Discussion on Issues Regarding Contemporary Beliefs

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大千出版社

在我们的人生中，信仰究竟意味着什么？是生命的最终依归，还是可有可无的点缀？信仰究竟又能为我们带来什么？是人生道路上的智慧明灯，还是遭遇挫折时的心灵安慰？在这个信仰缺失的时代，人们或是在信仰的真空中失去重心，或是在信仰的渴求中饥不择食，或是在信仰的探索中彷徨迷茫。那么，信仰的真空要靠什么来填补？信仰的渴求应当如何来解决？信仰的探索又该遵循怎样的标准？换言之，对信仰的诉求是否终将归于宗教？希望我们在本文探讨的问题，也正是您所关注的。

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一、信仰与人生

信仰所关注的是人生大事
包括生从何来、死往何去
包括对人生价值和生命自我的认识
也包括心灵的关怀及烦恼的解脱
这些都是人类永恒的问题
不会因为我们的忽略而不存在
一旦涉及这些问题而没有信仰作为支撑的话
人生往往会陷入迷茫之中



愿斋：是否所有人都有宗教信仰的需求？

济群：如果说所有人都有宗教信仰的需求，那未免绝对。因为在现实生活中，的确有许多人没有宗教信仰，也不曾意识到信仰对于人生的作用。尤其在中国社会，许多人对宗教都缺乏正面认识。在这样的前提下，信仰需求或者被扼杀在摇篮中，或者转化为其他需求。至于那些终日为衣食奔忙或沉溺声色的人，从未思考过人生大事，自然也觉得信仰是可有可无的。

但信仰所关注的是人生大事，包括生从何来、死往何去，包括对人生价值和生命自我的认识，也包括心灵的关怀及烦恼的解脱。这些都是人类永恒的问题，

不会因为我们的忽略而不存在。事实上，但凡有思想的人都可能碰到。一旦涉及这些问题而没有宗教信仰作为支撑的话，人生往往会陷入迷茫之中。

觉照：可以说绝大多数人都是有宗教信仰需求的。即使是那些自称没有任何宗教信仰的人，在人生的特殊时刻，尤其是死亡来临之时，也常常会发出诸如此类的感慨——“假如我有一种宗教信仰该多好啊！”

我觉得，只要这个世界还不完美，还存在种种苦难，种种缺陷，宗教信仰就有它存在的意义和价值。

觉照：也有人认为，有信仰总比没有信仰更好，这种观点对吗？

济群：拥有健康的宗教信仰，当然比没有宗教信仰更好。因为信仰能帮助我们找到人生的究竟归宿，净化自我的心灵，建立道德的规范，并引领我们踏上古圣先贤的求真探索之路。

愿斋：常常听到有人说：我什么都不信。这种人是否存在？这一观点的危害性是什么？

济群：这句话本身是有问题的，他们信不信食物可以充饥呢？信不信太阳可以给我们带来光明呢？真的什么都不信，就无法在世间生存了。事实上，他想要说明的只是自己什么宗教信仰也没有，却将这个问题极端化了。无神论者是存在的，即使是无神论者，也不能说什么也不信。

因为对宗教的长期隔阂，我们周围的确有很多没有任何宗教信仰的人。但如果连基本的人生信念也不具备，往往导致私欲的极端膨胀。近年来，功利主义在中国大行其道，以致拜金成风。其中的重要原因之一，就是缺乏信仰所致。

宗教是道德建立的基础，古往今来，许多民族都是依宗教建立自身的道德准则。“全心全意为人民服务”的口号提倡了几十年，这和菩萨道的精神完全一致。但人性是自私的，如果认识不到“为人民服务”的意义，没有道德理念作为基础，很难使人们自觉接

受，更难以长期坚持，也就无法具有持久的生命力。

闻道：也有人觉得做个好人就行了，为什么要有宗教信仰呢？他们认为，有些声称有信仰的人也未必比自己更善良。

济群：关于好人的说法非常笼统，每个人都有理由认为自己是好人，但究竟依循什么标准呢？而所谓的好人，也有不同程度的区别。我们一般所认为的好人，就是善良而富有爱心的人。从佛教的角度来说，能够依五戒十善生活，是人天乘的标准；能够断除贪、嗔、痴，是解脱道的标准；能够自觉觉他、自利利他，是菩萨道的标准；而圆满断德（生命中不再有贪嗔痴）、悲德（对众生具备无限慈悲）、智德（具足一切智慧）的佛陀，才是最究竟的好人。所以说，宗教信仰不仅为我们界定了是非善恶的标准，更为我们指明了完善道德的途径，能够帮助我们成为具有深度和纯度的好人。

不可否认，的确存在虽有信仰却品行不端的人。

但问题在于，这些人是否按照信仰的道德标准来要求自己？此外，每个人的素质和起点都不同，有些人积重难返，但只要有心向善并持之以恒，多少总是会发生转变的。我们衡量一个人时，不仅要进行横向比较，也要进行纵向比较。

觉照：宗教信仰不只是教我们做一个好人、做一个善良的人，同时也是教我们做一个有智慧的人。这一点佛教表现得最为突出。学佛必须福慧双修、悲智双运，两者缺一不可。

觉照：很多人认为，信仰只是为了寻找死后的归宿。若年轻时就信仰佛教，难免与生活 and 事业发生抵触，不妨等老了再考虑这个问题。

济群：人们在年轻时往往会有许多理想和追求，当他们将全部精力投入其中时，或许还意识不到信仰的意义。随着人生阅历的丰富，对世俗生活的虚幻才会有深切体会。尤其到“老来岁月增作减”的时候，

名利地位也好，家庭事业也好，与即将到来的死亡相比，似乎都显得不再重要。所以，人们在晚年更需要信仰的支撑，这也是信徒中老年人居多的主要原因。也因此有人认为，信仰只是老来的安慰，年轻时关注信仰还为时过早。

就佛教来说，既有出世的层面，也有入世的层面，绝非消极避世。它所关注的不仅是生死大事，也包括对现实人生的改善。佛陀在《善生经》中，就对世人如何处理家庭关系、如何看待财富等问题作了非常具体的开示。如果我们年轻时就依教奉行，会少走很多弯路。反之，若一生为欲望奔忙操劳，且不论结果如何，难免沾染许多不良习气，老来想要改变也往往力不从心。同时，对信仰的实践也需在年富力强时进行。历代祖师大德多是在年轻时便开始修道，佛陀更是在三十五岁便已觉悟。试想，同样是接受教育，在年轻时开始更好，还是到晚年开始才更好呢？

二、正信、迷信与邪信

唯有真理、唯有正信
才是破迷开悟的最佳利器

这又涉及两个问题

首先，我们破除的是不是迷信

其次，我们用以破除它的武器是不是真理

否则的话，我们很可能是

以一种迷信去破除另外一种迷信

甚至是迷信去障碍对真理的认识



闻道：说到信仰，人们往往会联想到迷信。究竟什么是迷信呢？

济群：迷为昏乱，分辨不清；信为相信、顺从。而迷信就是盲目的相信和崇拜。换句话说，凡不能把人导向觉悟、智慧和真理的信仰，皆可称为迷信。

从所信的对象来看，如果对象本身尚处于迷妄状态，那么建立其上的信自然也是迷妄的。通常，我们总觉得宗教信仰中才存在迷信现象。事实上，我们在生活中也常常陷于迷信而不自知。如贪财的人为财迷，贪色的人为色迷，爱看戏的人为戏迷，爱看球的人为球迷，类似的例子不胜枚举。也有些人迷信数字，如

广东人喜欢“八”，西方人忌讳“十三”和“星期五”。还有些人迷信名字，以为改一个吉利的名字就能为自己带来好运。这些也都是想当然的迷妄行为。

从我们自身来看，如果极端执迷于某事，也会引发迷信行为。如算命、看相之类，本可视为中国传统文化的一部分，未必是无稽之谈。因为命运的确有一定规律可循，这也就是佛法所说的“如是因感如是果”。但是，缘起的生命现象甚深难知，其中还包含诸多可以改造的不确定因素。如果我们过分相信算命、看相，以为命运一定是如此这般，那就大错特错了。

觉照：还有许多人将宗教等同于迷信，那么，如何认识宗教呢？

济群：将宗教等同于迷信的观点，反映了人们对宗教的无知。宗教并非人们想象的，源于人类对世界的无知或某种偶然因素，因而到一定时期就会完成其历史使命。纵观人类历史，从原始社会到今天的信息时代，宗教早已渗透在每个民族的文化中，渗透在我

们生活的各个领域，成为人类文明不可或缺的组成部分。虽然其中有多神、二神、一神、无神的演变，有低级和高级的不同，但宗教始终是精神生活的核心。

不可否认，某些宗教行为中的确掺杂了迷信色彩。所以说，我们必须了解正信、杂信、迷信乃至邪信之间的区别。

闻道：怎么看待“提倡科学、破除迷信”的说法呢？

济群：提倡科学能否破除迷信呢？事实上，在科学盛行的地区，在具有相当科学知识的人身上，迷信现象依然存在。因为人类的认识能力是有限的，科学能告诉我们关于外在世界的知识，却无法帮助我们认识自身的生命，认识内在的精神世界。

我们高举着“科学”的旗帜，但我们真正认识科学吗？真正了解科学的精神吗？我们把科学等同于真理，但科学尚处于不断的发展中；我们崇尚科学的力量，但科学是一把双刃剑，它所能产生的作用，取决

于它的掌握者和使用者。

唯有真理、唯有正信才是破迷开悟的最佳利器。这又涉及两个问题：首先，我们破除的是不是迷信？其次，我们用以破除它的武器是不是真理？否则的话，我们很可能是以一种迷信去破除另外一种迷信，甚至是以迷信去障碍对真理的认识。

问道：那么，佛教信仰中是否存在迷信的现象？佛教又是如何破除迷信的呢？

济群：佛教信仰中的确也存在着迷信现象。在许多名山宝刹，每天有成千上万的善男信女在烧香磕头，其中大多带有迷信色彩。因为在他们的心目中，佛菩萨就是人类的保护神，求求拜拜就能获得护佑。

佛教认为，迷是由于众生的无明所致。除了觉悟的圣者，又有哪个凡夫不迷呢？只是迷得深或浅罢了。正因为缺乏智慧，才使我们始终深陷于执著中，使人生始终充满困惑。所以，佛法特别强调智慧的作用，通过闻思经教树立人生正见，通过如理思维寻找解脱

之道。佛法所说的解脱包括心解脱和慧解脱，一方面使我们的的心灵从烦恼中解脱出来，一方面使我们的认识从困惑中解脱出来。当我们从烦恼和困惑中解脱之后，就不会再被迷情所转。

闻道：取缔法轮功，使某些人对宗教也心存畏惧。那么，邪教与宗教是否有着内在的联系，它们的区别又是什么？

济群：什么是邪教呢？一般而言，其教主多是因极度狂妄而自视为救世主，也有出于个人私欲而创教。在手段上，他们或是以一些似是而非的观点欺骗大众；或是以一些特异功能招徕信徒；乃至以危言扰乱视听，如宣扬世界末日即将到来等等，使人们因恐惧而依附其门下。总之，他们的所作所为决不是慈悲济世。

我们应当认识到，邪教和宗教的确有着某种联系。因为邪教往往会依附于某种传统宗教。比如法轮功盗用佛教名相，而西方许多邪教则依附基督教、天主教。

邪教所宣传的世界末日、上升天堂，以及教主对自己的神化，其表面形式往往来自于传统宗教，以增加其邪说的可信度。当然，他们会将剽窃的内容根据各自需要进行再加工。即使邪教中经常出现的劝人行善，也都是变了味的，只是蛊惑人心的伎俩。所以说，邪教是长在宗教身上的一颗毒瘤。

觉醒：信仰邪教会带来什么危害呢？

济群：这个问题，可能通过一些事实更容易说明。在“世界邪教大观”的网页上，转载了《环球时报》这样一段内容：

1978年11月18日，美国邪教组织“人民圣殿教”914名教徒在圭亚那集体服毒自杀，前往谈判并劝说的美国众议院议员赖恩及其随行人员也一同被杀。

1993年4月19日，“大卫教派”在美国德克萨斯州韦科市以东的卡梅尔庄园被联邦调查局出动的军警包围51天。庄园被攻陷后，庄园内的80多名邪教成员与教主大卫·考雷什一起集体自焚，葬身火海。

1994年和1995年，邪教组织“太阳圣殿教”先后在瑞士、加拿大、法国制造了多起集体自杀事件。

1995年3月20日，“奥姆真理教”在东京地铁制造了震惊世界的“沙林”毒气事件，导致12人死亡，5500人受伤。

1997年3月26日，美国加利福尼亚州圣地亚哥的一个邪教组织“天堂之门”教派，包括教主在内的39人集体自杀。

2000年3月17日，乌干达邪教组织“恢复上帝十诫运动”制造了骇人听闻的教徒集体自焚事件，530多名教徒在乌干达西南部的卡农古教堂里被集体烧死。随后，警方又发现多处被害教徒的坟墓，被害教徒总数达上千人。

闻道：如何才能避免邪信呢？

济群：当我们接触一种宗教时，不要一味盲从，而要认真地观察和思考：其教主是否具有大慈大悲的济世情怀，具有值得仰赖的高尚道德；其教义是否符合

合真理，能否使我们的人格得到升华并最终走向解脱。当我们选择一种宗教时，更不要有急功近利的想法，否则很容易因此误入歧途，因为邪教往往就是利用人性的弱点来吸引信徒并对其进行控制。当我们确定自己的信仰时，还要看它是否经过了时间的考验。事实证明，传统的佛教、道教、基督教、天主教、伊斯兰教等，无论对社会还是人类自身都是有益的。

三、信仰与理性、科学

掌握教理后能否得益
关键是看学佛的发心
如果仅仅将佛学当作学术来研究
不和自己的人生发生关系
不将佛法切实运用到生活中
是得不到佛法真实受益的
即使教理研究得再好
也难以生起虔诚的信心



觉照：我们常常会发现，一些信徒虽然不了解多少教理，却非常虔诚；而另一些信徒虽然掌握了很多教理，反而没有那么虔诚。这一现象说明了什么？

济群：信仰和人们的精神需求有关。如果内心对宗教有强烈需求，具备了足够的虔诚，自然容易身体力行地实践。一旦由实践得到切身的宗教体验，这种信仰就会比较坚固。但佛教信仰还应以理性为基础，如果缺乏这一基础，又缺乏宗教实证，即使初发心非常猛利，也很难一如既往地保持当初的虔诚。

至于掌握教理后能否得益，关键是看学佛的发心。如果仅仅将佛学当作学术来研究，不和自己的人生发

生关系，不将佛法切实运用到生活中，是得不到佛法真实受益的。即使教理研究得再好，也难以生起虔诚的信心。

云海：有些人认为信仰必须建立在“理性”基础上，有些人则认为必须首先做到“无条件的信”，应当如何看待这一问题？

济群：说到宗教，必然涉及信仰。基督教有“因信称义”“信者得度”之说，显示了信的绝对作用，这就是典型的“无条件的信”。因为许多宗教经验是超越理性层面的，所以往往对理性进行排斥。

但佛教认为，人类之所以为万物之灵，正是因为具有理性思维的能力。那么，提倡理性的佛教又是如何看待信的作用呢？《大智度论》告诉我们：“佛法以信为能入，智为能度。”要进入佛法海洋，首先必须有信，但要从佛法中得到利益，则必须依靠智慧（理性）。佛法修学包括“信、解、行、证”四个次第，也是以“信”作为进入佛门的第一步，再辅以“解”

和“行”，最后才能达到“证”的目的。只有对佛法生起信仰，然后才会去认识和理解，才有能力去行持和实践。反过来，对佛法有了深刻理解和切身实践之后，才能使信仰得到进一步深化。

关于信仰与理性之间的关系，印顺法师将其概括为：“佛法依正见而建立正信。”如果没有正见为基础，信仰很可能落入迷信乃至邪信中。佛教中还有一句话是：“有信无智（理性）长愚痴，有智无信增我慢。”辩证地指出了信仰与理性的关系。

佛法是非常重视理性的，当然这是指正确而健康的理性。佛法修行以八正道为纲领，其中又以正见和正思维为要，也就是说，正确的认识和思考是修学佛法的必要保障。有了理性的指导，才能引发正语、正业、正命、正精进、正念和正定的修行。

云海：在网上经常看到佛教徒与自然科学工作者之间的交流。一些佛教徒常在言语之间将科学工作者归于“八难”中的“邪见众”，引起了科学工作者们的强烈反感，并多次指出许多攻击科学的佛教徒实际

上不懂科学。

济群：科学研究是人类认识世界的一种方式，本身说不上“正见”或“邪见”，关键在于指导科学研究的“见”是否正确。教界人士对科学工作者的责难，主要是和唯物论的知见有关。就科学研究本身来说，如果不执著唯物论为基本出发点，而是本着求真的精神对未知世界进行客观探索，那么双方应该还是很有共同语言的。人们可以通过各种渠道来追求真理，也包括科学研究。如果一概加以否定，是坏人善根。即使对于知见不正的人，也应善意引导。

这一现象，还使我联想到另一种极端。长期以来，很多人都将科学等同于真理，而视宗教为迷信，试图以科学代替宗教。其实，这两种想法都是极为片面的。宗教和科学是两个不同的领域，解决人生中存在的不同问题。科学是帮助我们认识物质世界，改善生存环境；而宗教则是建立社会道德，解决生死归宿。两者无法相互取代。所以，牛顿、爱因斯坦等许多著名科学家也都有宗教信仰。

觉照：有了宗教信仰之后，还能客观地从事学术研究吗？

济群：许多研究宗教的学者都标榜自己没有信仰，也常听到一些学者说，虽然我不反对学生有宗教信仰，但我不希望他们在研究中介入信仰成分。这似乎都在表明，一旦拥有信仰，就会使学术研究失去客观性。之所以会有这样的观点，应该和历史上某些宗教对理性的压制有关。

但佛教信仰和理性并不冲突。从佛法的角度来看，理性正是人类通达真理、成就解脱的基础。但我们也要认识到，理性往往是以个人的经验、知识及好恶为基础，这就使它很难摆脱自身的局限。所以，学术界在很多问题上都莫衷一是，“彼亦一是非，此亦一是非”。

我认为，从事佛教的学术研究，只有以信仰为基础，才能更客观地认识佛教。如果不真正走入佛教，怎么可能透彻地认识佛教呢？长期以来，人们总是在某种思想观念的指导下研究佛教，可想而知，其客观

程度将会如何。何况，能够通过书本和知识传达的佛教内涵很有限，如果没有修证体验，几乎不可能如实、客观、深入地了解佛教。

《瑜伽师地论》曾说到四种真实：世间极成真实、道理极成真实、烦恼障净智所行真实、所知障净智所行真实。学术研究只能达到道理真实的层面，而圣贤们成就的是烦恼障净智所行真实、所知障净智所行真实，这是没有宗教实践的人永远无法抵达的境界。

云海：一般的宗教和科学一样，都是带有某些既不能被证实也不能被证伪的形而上学基本假设。如果带着某个基本假设来解释另一个基本假设，两个基本假设之间发生冲突的可能性就很大。这是科学研究的大忌！而佛教本来就不带这种预设的形而上学假设，其基本的原则就是“如实知见”，因此信仰佛教不会对科学研究产生障碍的。

四、宗教与社会进步

在我们的想象中
进步和发展总是比落后要好
而我们所谈的进步和发展
又往往局限于经济和科技
在这样的浪潮中
淳朴的民风、传统的美德
悠闲的心境都在渐渐失去
以失去这些为代价的发展
是否值得呢



云海：有些学者认为，非竞争性的佛教信仰是中华民族近 500 年间不能自立于世界前列的根本原因。而其他佛教国家，如緬、泰、老及斯里兰卡等皆属于不发达国家，中南半岛文明发祥地的柬埔寨更是如此。现代社会是强者生存、崇尚竞争的社会。要完成中华民族复兴的伟大事业，就要将佛教等“东郭先生”式的“软骨头”思想从中华民族的主体思想中清除出去。

愿斋：这种观点是站不住脚的。中华民族的主体思想基本由儒释道三家构成，在历史上曾为中华民族的数度辉煌立下汗马功劳，如果说在过去的时代尚能如此，那么在高度文明的今天，也应当能进一步发挥

作用。事实证明，受这种思想影响的不少亚洲国家和地区，如日本、韩国、新加坡及中国港台等地，还有千百万海外华人，都为世界创造了繁荣。中国近代以来的衰弱，或许正和蔑视本民族优秀文化，盲目学习西方，提倡连西方都不以为然的“社会达尔文主义”有关。有人接受进化论之后，就以此作为衡量一切的标准。进化论对于动物界是适用的，但对于人类来说，近现代社会发生的腥风血雨，便和“社会达尔文主义”的泛滥不无关系。在文明的今天，究竟是提倡佛教的非暴力精神，还是主张弱肉强食的无情竞争更符合人们的愿望呢？

济群：佛教对社会的影响不可能是全部的，所以将国家兴衰简单归罪于佛教是片面的。就中国来说，佛教虽然与传统文化水乳交融，但真正治国还是依儒家的思想。此外，也不能以经济发达作为衡量社会健康发展的唯一标准。

如果说佛教的消极在于强调了非暴力，难道现代社会还需要暴力吗？这个世界已经有了太多的争斗，

人类与天斗、与地斗、与人斗，结果又如何呢？当我们斗到精疲力竭之际，又靠什么来抚慰自己的心灵？

从经济发展来看，西方国家固然更强大，但社会问题并没有因此消除。所以说，一个健康的社会，应该是经济和文化平衡发展的社会，是具有良好的道德风尚的社会。至于佛教对于当今社会的作用，取决于佛教思想能为我们提供什么样的帮助。如果佛法能为我们提供智慧食粮，为世界带来和平安定，那正是当今社会所需要的。

闻道：问题是，现在的世界和平就是靠武力来维持的。为什么中国在过去几百年一直遭受侵略？就是因为我们经济落后，正所谓“落后就要挨打”。

济群：目前，人类拥有的核武器足以把地球毁灭几十次，通过发展核武器来互相制衡，难道是制止战争爆发唯一可行的方法吗？我们怎样才能保证这些核武器会得到安全的保存？事实上，世界多一件武器，就多一个不安定因素，多一个引发战争的导火索。所

以说，再先进的武器也只能使世界变得更加危机四伏，而不是和平安定。美国的“9·11”事件就足以使我们警醒。他们的经济可谓发达，武器可谓精良，仍然无法避免这样的灾难。正如一行禅师所说，世界和平始于人类内心的和平。

闻道：佛法中所说的“不”“空”“无”，是否会使我们脱离现实社会呢？如果所有人都接受这样的观念，是否会导致社会停滞不前呢？

济群：现代人喜欢谈进步和发展，在我们的想象中，进步和发展总是比落后要好。而我们所谈的进步和发展，又往往局限于经济和科技。在这样的浪潮中，淳朴的民风、传统的美德、悠闲的心境都在渐渐失去。以失去这些为代价的发展，是否值得呢？因为人类的幸福，更在于良好的心态和健康的身体。

而佛经中所说的“不”“空”“无”，并非我们理解的一无所所有。佛教所说的“空”，是要否定我们错误的认识和执著，因为这正是我们的烦恼之源。倘能

认识到存在的一切都是缘起、无自性空的，一切都是因缘和合的假相，那么生活中的任何变化都无法伤害我们，我们才能更从容地面对人生。

觉照：健全的法律和良好的社会制度，能取代宗教吗？

济群：西方人文主义的兴起，就是对中世纪神权统治的否定，认为通过良好的社会制度就可解决一切问题。通过几百年的努力，虽然社会制度已日趋完善，但各种问题还是层出不穷。因为健全的法律只能制裁犯罪，却不能消除犯罪；良好的制度只能减少导致犯罪的因素，却不能消除实施犯罪的动机。可见，社会问题归根到底还是个人的问题。如果我们的内心无法获得宁静，如果我们的行为失去道德准则，社会又怎能出现安定的局面？



五、信仰的现象分析

很多人之所以会信仰淡化
关键在于他们的信仰本身比较盲目
信仰并未在他们的思维中扎下根来
如何使我们的信仰得到巩固
或以理性认识，或以实践证得，或以感应道交
如果既没有胜解，也没有实证，又没有感应
信仰自然就会逐渐空洞
最后淡化或退失也就不奇怪了



愿斋：前面说过，烧香礼佛的现象往往带有迷信色彩。那么，这些行为能否将我们导向真正的宗教信仰呢？

济群：信仰是寻找一种终生的依赖，这种依赖将贯穿我们整个人生。所以，当我们确定自己的信仰时，往往需要举行某种仪式。如基督教的洗礼，佛教的皈依。凡没有经历这一过程的，不能算作真正的基督徒或佛教徒。

就佛教来说，皈依的关键在于宣称三皈的时刻，即“尽形寿皈依佛，尽形寿皈依法，尽形寿皈依僧”。这是我们选择佛教作为信仰后宣告的誓言，直接关系

到我们能否获得佛教徒的资格。当然，成为合格的佛弟子还须遵行相应的戒律，如佛教的五戒等。这才是区别佛教徒与非佛教徒的标准。

至于那些不曾皈依受戒而只知烧香礼佛的人，或是出于朦胧的宗教需求；或是停留在民间信仰阶段，对寺院、道观、神庙都一视同仁地顶礼膜拜；或是纯粹的功利行为，抱着宁可信其有不可信其无的态度来投机。严格地说，都不属于宗教信仰的范畴。当然，若以虔诚心礼佛，也能因此获得内心安宁，并种下善根和福德。而在亲近三宝的过程中，也有更多的机会接触到正信的佛教。

觉照：有些人是因为事业或感情受到挫折才转向宗教寻求安慰，应该如何看待这种信仰的动机呢？

济群：每个人都有自己寻找信仰的契机，但这只是出发点，关键是在此基础上引发正确的信仰。从佛教的角度来说，如果只是因为遭遇挫折而寻求心灵安慰或精神寄托，并不是佛教所提倡的发心，很难引发

健康的信仰，对我们探索真理也不会有切实的帮助。

不可否认，苦难和挫折也是引发信仰的因素。因为人生有种种苦难，我们才会生起离苦得乐的愿望。生命是脆弱的，佛陀当年也正是有感于世间老病死的痛苦才发心求道。所以，信仰并非逃避现实的手段，而是改善人生、探索真理的动力。

愿斋：那一个人是否可以拥有多种宗教信仰呢？

济群：这通常是因为信得不深。如果信得很深，自然不会这么杂。许多宗教都有强烈的排他性，佛教虽然比较包容，但也要求专一。比方说，即使我们同时拥有几处房子，但睡觉也只能在一个地方，如果整夜在各处游走，势必无法安眠。信仰是为了寻找归宿，而真正的归宿应该是唯一的。

觉照：有些人觉得佛教信徒中文化层次还是偏低。这一现象说明了什么？

愿斋：我们所接受的教育对宗教始终持批判态度，这使很多知识分子视佛教为迷信，自然也就很难信佛。相对而言，没有多少文化的人不易受到意识形态的影响。但西方的佛教徒往往文化层次较高，说明这种现象只是地区问题，而不是佛教本身的问题。

云海：“五四”运动前，儒家是中国的主流文化，它对佛教也是排斥的，所以受过教育的人对佛教普遍有抵触情绪；而没有受过教育的人，这种抵触情绪就小得多。久而久之，就使人们误以为佛教只是“低”层次的人所信。

东南亚泰、缅等佛教国家，佛教传入几乎与文明进程同步，因此以佛教为基础的人天乘善法自然成了这些民族的主流知见。泰、缅等国几乎全民信佛，不管文化水平高低，对佛教的信仰都被当作光荣的事。我国藏地的情况与此相似，甚至历史上的文化精英也多为僧人。但是在汉文化圈子中就不同，因为汉文明本身的知见是和佛教相抵触的。

济群：佛教信徒的文化层次偏低，只是特定时期的特殊现象，是人们对佛教的隔阂与无知所造成。在古今中外的社会精英中，信仰佛教者比比皆是。从另一个角度来说，佛教具有博大的哲理体系和严密的思辨逻辑，假如没有精深的学养，是很难步入佛教思想殿堂的。

觉照：从现状来看，佛教徒中女性占了相当比例，这一现象又说明了什么？

云海：女性富有慈心和同情心，在逆境中的忍耐力较强，于佛法也容易生信。但由于受“三纲五常”等封建专制流毒的影响，传统模式的中华女性在心智方面存在很多缺陷：如拒绝理性思维、依赖性强、意志薄弱等等。这对有志于修学解脱道的女性来说都必须引起重视，否则就会出现“能信而不能行”“信而无解”或迷信等令人遗憾的结果。佛教光有信仰是不够的，更重要的是依教奉行。

济群：从总体上看，学佛的女性的确比男性多。因为女性感情细腻，比较容易感受人生痛苦。此外，女性更需要寻找依赖，而男性则相对独立，容易自以为是。再有一个原因是，男性事业心强，当他沉溺于事业时，根本无暇考虑人生问题。相对来说，女性有更多时间和机会去接触佛教。

愿斋：常听人说：“学佛一年，佛在眼前；学佛三年，佛在西天。”为什么会出现这种信仰淡化的现象？作为一个佛教徒，应该如何坚定自己的信仰？

觉照：当今社会对人的诱惑实在太大了，如果一个学佛的人没有法喜，得不到佛法的真实利益，信仰必然要受到冲击。其次，发心不正、动机不纯也是一个重要因素。佛教最终是要解决苦的问题，但我们对苦的认识往往很肤浅。仅仅通过书本认识苦是远远不够的，我们必须在现实人生中亲身感受并体验自己和他人的痛苦。苦难能唤起人的信仰，增强人的道心。

济群：佛教信仰应以出离心和菩提心为基础，这也是我们坚守信仰的重要保证。很多人虽然信仰佛教，但从未生起过出离心和菩提心，或者在初发心之后逐渐将它们忘失了。原因在哪里呢？心的活动需要因缘去滋润。过去的修道人非常重视无常观和不净观的修习，就是为了巩固自己的出离心。如果我们平时深陷于世俗环境和欲望需求中，久而久之，心就会进入世俗的轨道。同样，菩提心也要通过不断的观想和实践来深化。而汉传佛教在这两方面都做得很不够。

信仰还要建立在对佛法义理的认识之上。很多人之所以会信仰淡化，关键在于他们的信仰本身比较盲目，对佛法缺乏足够的认识。换句话说，信仰并未在他们的思维中扎下根来。如何使我们的信仰得到巩固？或者是通过理性认识，或者是通过实践证得，或者通过感应道交。如果既没有胜解，也没有实证，又没有感应，信仰自然就会逐渐空洞，最后淡化或退失也就不奇怪了。即使表面没有放弃信仰，也会落入“习惯性的麻木”，甚至逐渐转向对世俗名利的追求。

所以，要依正见建立正信，佛教与外道的不共之

处就是正见。但对于信仰的实践，不能仅仅停留在思想认识上，它需要我们去身体力行。如果有正见的指引，再辅以出离心和菩提心，信仰就能不断得到加强和巩固，得到深化和升华。







A DISCUSSION
ON ISSUES REGARDING
CONTEMPORARY BELIEFS

Master Jiqun

Translated by MPI Translation Center

What does faith mean in our lives? Is it life's ultimate reliance or a dispensable embellishment? What exactly can faith offer us? A beacon of light illuminating our path forward, or a comforting balm for our spirits in times of setback? In an age of lacking faith, people either falter in their life's journey due to the lack of it, or accept whatever comes their way being hungry for faith, or even get lost in the search for spiritual support. What can fill the vacuum created by the absence of faith? How should we address our need for faith? What are the principles to follow in the quest for faith? In other words, does the quest for faith necessarily lead to a religious belief? Hopefully, the following discussion resonates with your contemplation.

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I

FAITH AND LIFE

Yuanzhai: Does everyone need religious belief?

Jiqun: It's a bit extreme to claim that everyone needs to believe in a religion. There are plenty of people who have no religious faith or awareness of its effect on life. Especially in modern Chinese society, many people lack a realistic understanding of religion. As a consequence, people's needs for faith are either strangled in the cradle or converted into other needs. People who are struggling to make ends meet or indulging in sensual pleasures may have never thought of anything other than mundane issues. Naturally, they find faith dispensable.

Faith concerns significant aspects of life, such as where we were before birth, where we will be after death, understanding ourselves and the value of life, caring for our spiritual needs, and freedom from afflictions. These are eternal questions of human beings, and will never cease to exist because of our neglect. In fact, every thinking person can encounter these questions. Once we have such questions but are not supported by a religious faith, we may be bothered by confusion.

Juezhao: It seems fair to say that most people have the need for religious faith. When we are in particular moments of our lives, especially when facing impending death, even those who claim to be atheists will often exclaim, “If only I had a religious belief!”

I believe that as long as the world is imperfect with all kinds of suffering and defects, religion will serve its purpose and value.

Juezhao: There is also an opinion that having faith is

always better than not having one. Is it correct?

Jiqun: Having a healthy religious belief is undoubtedly better than having no religious belief. Because faith can help us find life's ultimate refuge, purify our minds, establish moral standards, and guide us onto the path of seeking truth as pursued by ancient sages.

Yuanzhai: We often hear people say, "I don't believe in anything." Do they really mean it? What are the dangers of this statement?

Jiqun: This statement is fundamentally flawed. Do they believe that food can satisfy their hunger? Do they believe that the sun brings light? It is impossible to survive in this world if one believes in nothing. People say that to express that they do not have any religious belief, but have made this claim extreme. Atheists do exist, but being an atheist doesn't mean they believe in absolutely nothing.

Due to long-term alienation from religions, many people around us do not have any religious beliefs. However, lacking fundamental beliefs in life often results in an extreme expansion of selfish desire. Utilitarianism has grown fast and wide in China in recent years, breeding a money-worshipping culture, and one of the most important reasons behind this is the lack of faith.

Religion is the foundation of morality. Throughout the ages, numerous cultures have relied on religion to build their moral standards. The Chinese slogan “Serving the People Wholeheartedly” has been going around for many decades, which perfectly matches the spirit of the Bodhisattva path. But human nature can be selfish. Without recognizing the significance of “serving the people,” individuals will find it challenging to consciously embrace this principle and even more challenging to live up to it in the long term, thus lacking enduring vitality.

Wendao: Some people think that “being a good person” is enough, “Why is there a need for religious belief?” They

believe that some religious people aren't necessarily kinder than they are.

Jiqun: The idea of “being a good person” is very vague. Every individual has reasons to see themselves as a “good person.” But what standards are they based upon? And the supposed “good person” also differs in extent. Those we often consider as good people are conscientious and loving. But from the perspective of Buddhism, the standards for being a good person include: complying with the Five Precepts and the Ten Wholesomeness in one's life, which defines the Vehicle of Human and Devas; eradicating greed, hatred, and ignorance, which is the standard of the Path of Liberation; being capable of enlightening and benefiting both oneself and others, which sets the Bodhisattva path; and finally, the Buddha, who has obtained the merit of severing afflictions (being devoid of greed, hatred, and ignorance in life), the merit of compassion (having infinite compassion for all living beings), and the merit of wisdom (possessing all knowledge), is considered the epitome of a good person. Religious faith

not only defines the standards of being right, wrong, good, and evil for us, but also, more importantly, guides us onto the path of moral development, and helps us become good people with depth and purity.

Undoubtedly, some people have religious faith but are dishonorable. The question is, do they discipline themselves with the moral standards of their beliefs? Besides, each individual has their starting point. Some ingrained habits are not to be changed overnight. But as long as people consistently strive to be good, changes will happen, big or small. When we evaluate a person, we should do it both comparatively and historically.

Juezhao: Religious faith teaches us to be not only good and kind but also wise. This is a point particularly emphasized in Buddhism, which calls for the cultivation of both blessings and wisdom, integrating compassion with wisdom. They are inseparable.

Juezhao: Many people believe that religion is just for

finding a spirit lodge after death. Taking refuge in Buddhism at a young age would inevitably conflict with their life and career pursuits, so they might as well consider this matter until old age.

Jiquan: People usually have many ambitions and pursuits in their youth. When they are fully engaged with these ambitions, they are probably unaware of the significance of a religious belief. Only after they have seen much in their lives would they deeply understand the illusory nature of worldly matters. Especially when they become old and their days are numbered, fame, social status, family, and career no longer seem essential compared with imminent death. That's the primary reason why people in their later years need spiritual support more than ever, and why the elderly group accounts for the majority of religious believers. People are thus convinced that religion serves only as comforts for the old, while not necessary in youth.

Buddhism contains both mundane and supramundane

aspects, so it is not pessimism or reclusion. Buddhism concerns not only the significant issues of life and death, but also the improvement of one's current life. In the *Sigalovada Sutta*, the Buddha has made very specific instructions on how to handle family relationships and treat wealth, etc. If we can practice according to his teachings at a young age, we will be able to avoid many detours. On the contrary, if we spend our lives busily fulfilling desires, no matter what the results are, we will inevitably get caught in many bad habits, and find it difficult to change these habits at an older age. Besides, religious practices are better to be performed at a younger age when we are physically strong. Most great masters in history began practicing in their early years – the Buddha attained awakening at the age of thirty-five. For any form of education, is it better to begin in one's youth or to wait until one's later years?

II

RIGHT BELIEF, SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF, AND DEVIANT BELIEF

Wendao: When speaking about religious faith, people often associate it with superstitions (*mi xin*). What is superstition?

Jiqun: *Mi* refers to a state of being ignorant and confused, unable to discern clearly; *xin* refers to trusting and following. So *mi xin*, or superstition, is blind belief and worship out of ignorance. In other words, any belief that cannot guide people to enlightenment, wisdom, and truth can be called a superstitious belief.

If the object of the belief is ignorant or confused in itself, then the faith built on top of it is naturally so. People usually assume that superstitions only exist among religious beliefs. In fact, we are often manipulated by superstitions in our lives without noticing it. There are numerous examples, such as those who crave money and blindly worship it, those who lust after beauty and are deluded by it, those who love operas and are obsessed with them, and those who fancy sports fervently follow them. There are people superstitious about numbers: in China, the Cantonese favor the number “eight,” while a lot of Westerners view Friday the thirteenth as a taboo. Some people are superstitious about names, believing that an auspicious name will bring them fortune. These are all superstitious beliefs – acts out of delusion.

If we become extremely obsessed with something, it can also lead to superstitious acts. For example, as part of traditional Chinese culture, practices like fortune-telling and physiognomy are not entirely nonsense. It is because our fate does follow a regular pattern, as the Buddha

Dharma states, “a cause evokes a corresponding effect.” Yet, the dependent co-arising of life is too sophisticated to fathom, as it contains many variables that can be altered. If we blindly trust fortune-telling and physiognomy, thinking that our destiny will be exactly as told, we will be seriously mistaken.

Juezhao: Besides, many people associate religion with superstition. How should we understand religion?

Jiqun: The opinion that equals religion with superstition reflects people’s ignorance about religion. Religion did not – as some people assumed – arise from innocence about the world or certain coincidences, nor is it destined to complete its historical mission at a predetermined time. Throughout human history – from the primitive age to today’s information era, religion has already permeated every culture and every aspect of our daily lives. It has become an indispensable component of human civilization. Despite the variance of polytheism, duotheism, monotheism, and nontheism, low levels

or high levels, religion has always been the core of our spiritual life.

It is undeniable that some religious acts have been adulterated with superstitions. Therefore, we must understand the difference between right belief, eclectic belief, superstitious belief, and deviant belief.

Wendao: How to understand the advocacy of “Elevate Science, Eliminate Superstition”?

Jiqun: Can we truly eliminate superstitions by elevating science? In fact, in regions where science prevails, superstitious beliefs can still be found among individuals who are well-equipped with scientific knowledge. Human cognitive ability is limited. Although science can give us knowledge about the world, it cannot help us understand our own life and our spiritual world.

We think we are earnest believers in science, but do we truly understand science? Do we understand the scientific

spirit? We regard science as truth, but science is still under development. We revere the power of science, but science can be a double-edged sword, the effect of which depends on its possessor and user.

Truth and the right belief are the best tools to help us dispel ignorance and attain enlightenment. This involves two questions. First, is what we aim to eliminate superstition? Second, is truth the weapon we use to eliminate it? If not, we are likely replacing one blind faith with another, or even blocking ourselves from recognizing the truth.

Wendao: Are there blind faith or superstitious beliefs among Buddhists? How does Buddhism break superstitions?

Jiqun: There are indeed superstitious beliefs among Buddhists. Every day, we can find tens of thousands of believers, men and women, bowing and burning incense in famous temples – most of their beliefs are deluded. In

their minds, Buddhas and bodhisattvas are the guardians of humanity, and one can easily receive blessings by praying and worshipping them.

Buddhism recognizes delusion as the result of living beings' ignorance. Apart from the awakened sages, who among the ordinary beings is not deluded? Only that we are deluded in different degrees. It is the lack of wisdom that leaves us drenched in attachment and our lives full of confusion. That is why Buddhism stresses the importance of wisdom. We need to establish the right views by studying the Buddha's teachings, and pursuing the path of liberation by reflecting in accordance with the Dharma. The liberation that Buddha Dharma teaches includes Mind-Liberation and Wisdom-Liberation. On the one hand, it frees our mind from afflictions, and on the other hand, it lifts our cognition out of confusion. When we detach ourselves from afflictions and confusion, we will no longer be swayed by delusions.

Wendao: The outlawing Falun Gong has also made

people fear religion. Thus, is there any correlation between cults and religion? What are their differences?

Jiqun: What is a cult? In general, cult leaders are extremely self-conceited and thus see themselves as world saviors. Some of them create cults out of their selfish desires. They usually deceive the public with specious arguments, attract followers with supernatural powers, or even mislead the public with alarmist talks, such as preaching that the world is coming to an end, to make people cling to their sects out of fear. In short, what they do is by no means compassionate salvation for the world.

We should be aware that cults and religion do have some correlations because cults often derive from certain established religions. For example, Falun Gong misappropriates Buddhist terms, and many Western cults latch onto Christianity and Catholicism. What cults preach – the doomsday, the ascension to heaven, and the preacher’s self-deification – often depend on established religions to increase the credibility of their heresies. Inevitably, they

would rework the content to fit their needs. Even though cults appear to urge people to do good deeds, it is often distorted into something else – a mere demagogic trick. Cults are a malignant tumor on religion.

Juezhao: What harm will joining the cults bring?

Jiqun: This question can be better explained with actual events. The website “Grand View of World’s Cults” referenced an article from *Global Times*:

“On November 18, 1978, a total of 914 disciples of the People’s Temple, an American Cult, committed mass suicide by drinking cyanide-laced Flavor Aid in Guyana. Senator Leo Ryan and accompanying members who were sent to investigate were also killed.

“On April 19, 1993, the Branch Davidians held a 51-day stand-off against federal agents in Mount Carmel, Texas, USA. Leader David Koresh and over 80 followers died, many in a fire, following the destruction of Mount Carmel.

“Between 1994 and 1995, the Solar Temple caused several mass suicides in Switzerland, Canada, and France.

“On March 20, 1995, the Aleph carried out the shocking Tokyo subway sarin attack that killed 12 people and injured 5,500 more.

“On March 26, 1997, 39 disciples of the Heaven’s Gate committed suicide in California, USA, including their religious leader.

“On March 17, 2000, the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, a Ugandan cult, masterminded the burning of over 530 disciples in a building in the Kanungu district of southwest Uganda. Authorities later discovered that many more people belonging to the same cult had died and been secretly buried, amounting to one thousand people.”

Wendao: How do we avoid joining cults?

Jiqun: When we come into contact with a religion, we must not blindly follow it in the first place. We must carefully observe and consider several questions: does the preacher possess great loving-kindness and compassion to better the world and have noble morals worthy to be relied on? Does the doctrine speak the truth and help us improve our character to eventually reach liberation? When choosing a religion to follow, we must not haste to achieve certain results, or else we will be easily misled. Cults often exploit the weakness of human nature to seduce followers and manipulate them. Before we take refuge in a religion, we also need to see if it has stood the test of time. Facts prove that established religions like Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam benefit both society and individuals.

III

FAITH, RATIONALITY, AND SCIENCE

Juezhao: We often see some Buddhists being very pious but not knowing much about the Doctrines, while some other Buddhists know a lot about the teachings but are not as devout. How does this phenomenon come about?

Jiqun: The impact of faith corresponds to a person's spiritual needs. People with a strong need for religion often have enough earnestness to practice it vigorously. Once our practice gives us first-hand spiritual experiences, our faith will become stronger. However, faith in Buddhism must be based on rationality. Without such a foundation or any first-hand experience from practices,

one will find it difficult to adhere to the faith even with great resolve and motivation at the beginning.

Whether we can benefit from the Doctrines depends on our resolve or motivation to learn Buddhism. If we only study Buddhism as an academic subject, instead of associating it with ourselves or applying the Buddha Dharma in our lives, we cannot truly benefit. Without practice, we will find it hard to develop pious faith, no matter how great the teachings are.

Yunhai: While some believe that faith must be established on “rationality,” others claim that followers must first “believe it unconditionally.” How should we view the difference?

Jiqun: Religion inevitably revolves around faith. Christianity has teachings like “justification by faith,” and “salvation through faith,” which exhibit the absolute role of faith. This is the typical “unconditional belief.” Religious experience often goes beyond rationality,

and many religions even reject rationality.

But in Buddhism, humans are the “most intelligent of all” precisely because of our ability of rational thinking. Buddhism advocates rationality, so how does it view the function of faith? The *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* tells us, “In the ocean of Buddha Dharma, faith gives us the strength to set sail, but wisdom is the key to cross the ocean.” One must have faith to access the vast Buddhist wisdom, but one needs to rely on wisdom (rationality) to reap the benefits of Buddhism. In the four steps of Buddhist practices – believing, understanding, practicing, and realizing, “believing” is the threshold for entry into Buddhism, which is then supported by “understanding” and “practicing” to ultimately reach the goal of “realizing.” It is only by having faith in Buddhism that we can understand Buddha’s Dharma and further be able to practice along with it. On the other hand, deep understanding and personal experience in Buddhist practice can further strengthen our faith.

As for the correlation between faith and rationality, Venerable Master Yin Shun summarized it as “Buddhism relies on the Right View to build the Right Belief.” Without the Right View as the foundation, our beliefs may easily become deluded or even deviant. There is another saying in Buddhism, “Faith without wisdom breeds ignorance, while wisdom (or reason) without faith leads to arrogance,” which dialectically points out the relationship between faith and rationality.

Buddhism values rationality dearly. Of course, here it refers to the correct and healthy one. The Noble Eightfold Path is the guideline for Buddhist practices, in which the Right View and the Right Intention are priorities. The right understanding and right thinking are necessary guarantees in Buddhist practices. It is with the guidance of rationality that we can establish the practice of Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

Yunhai: We often see talks between Buddhists and

scientists on the internet. Some Buddhists often categorize scientists in their speeches as “holders of the deviated views,” listed among the “Eight Difficulties.” This induced vehemence from scientists, who repeatedly noted that the Buddhists who attacked science actually knew nothing about it.

Jiqun: Scientific research is one of many ways for humans to understand the world; it is not inherently a “right view” nor a “deviated view.” What is important is whether the “view” that guides scientific research is correct. Buddhists’ denunciation of scientists is mainly related to their obsession with materialism. As to scientific research itself, as long as scientists explore the unknown world with the spirit of seeking the truth in an objective way, rather than clinging to materialism as the foundation to begin with, the two sides should have a lot in common. We can discover the truth via many routes, including science. On the other hand, denying everything about science is an act of ruining good roots. It’s best to guide people with deviated views in a benevolent manner.

Such a phenomenon reminds me of another extreme situation. For a long time, many people have been equating science as truth and religion as superstition, and trying to replace religion with science. Both opinions are biased. Science and religion are two different fields that deal with different aspects of our lives. Science helps us understand the material world and improve our living conditions, while religion establishes moral standards and explains the origin of life and the destination of death. They can not replace one another. That is why many renowned scientists, such as Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, also had religious beliefs.

Juezhao: Can people still conduct academic research objectively after becoming religious?

Jiqun: Many researchers on religion claim to be atheistic. We often hear scholars claim that even though they are not against students having religious beliefs, they do not want their students to involve anything religious in their research. It seems to suggest that once people become

religious, their academic research will no longer be objective. This opinion must have to do with historical periods when religious authority suppressed rationality.

However, Buddhist faith and rationality do not conflict with each other. From the perspective of Buddha Dharma, rationality is the foundation for humans to access truth and become liberated. We must also realize, though, that rationality is often based on personal experience, knowledge, and preference, which makes it difficult to surpass its limitations. Thus, there is no consensus on many academic questions – the criteria for one situation may not be the criteria for another.

In my opinion, when researching Buddhism, objective understanding is only possible when it is founded on faith. How can we form a comprehensive understanding without truly engaging in Buddhism? For a long time, people have been researching Buddhism under the guidance of other philosophies. It's hard to imagine their objectivity. Besides, there is only a limited message of Buddha

Dharma that can be delivered through knowledge in books. Without personal practice, it is nearly impossible for us to understand Buddhism truthfully, objectively, and deeply.

The *Yogacarabhumi-Sastra* once revealed the four levels of apprehension of reality: reality as formulated by mundane cognition, reality as formulated by accurate reasoning, reality as formulated by the cognition purified of the afflictive hindrances, and reality as formulated by the cognition purified of the cognitive hindrances. Academic studies can only achieve the reality as formulated by accurate reasoning, while the attainment of sages includes the reality as formulated by the cognition purified of the afflictive hindrances and the reality as formulated by the cognition purified of the cognitive hindrances, which is the level non-religious persons could never achieve.

Yunhai: Many religions and science are alike, for they carry certain fundamental metaphysical hypotheses that could be neither verified nor falsified. If we use one

fundamental hypothesis to explain another fundamental hypothesis, they are likely to conflict with each other. This is a major taboo of scientific research. But Buddhism never has these metaphysical hypotheses as its premise. Its fundamental principle is “seeing as it is.” So, believing in Buddhism will not hinder people from conducting scientific research.

IV

RELIGION AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Yunhai: Some scholars believe that Buddhism's non-competitiveness is the main reason that China could not enter the world's top ranks in the last half-century. Other Buddhist countries like Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka are all underdeveloped countries, especially Cambodia – the birthplace of Indo-chinese culture. In the modern world, people encourage competition and worship the survival of the strongest. To revitalize the Chinese nation, some believe that meek and soft ideologies such as Buddhism should be ruled out from the major ideologies in Chinese history.

Yuanzhai: This opinion is untenable. The core philosophy of the Chinese nation is structured by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. They have made significant contributions to many of China's glorious periods in history. They should also be able to play their parts in the highly civilized modern era. It is proven that many Asian countries like Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, along with tens of millions of overseas Chinese who are influenced by these traditional ideologies, have helped to create prosperity for the world. On the contrary, China's decline in modern times could be the result of our contempt for our excellent traditional culture, and blindly following Western ideas, especially advocating Social Darwinism, which even the Western world no longer approves. Some people accept evolutionism and regard it as the sole criterion against everything. While applicable to animals, Social Darwinism, which is derived from evolutionism, has caused much bloodshed in modern society. So, in today's world where civilization prevails, which better fits people's ideal, the law of the jungle that encourages ruthless competition, or the non-violent

spirit that Buddhism stands for?

Jiqun: Buddhism cannot be the sole factor that influences society, so attributing Buddhism to a country's rise and fall is biased. Take China for example, even though Buddhism has harmoniously blended with Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism is what the governance relied on. Besides, economic advancement cannot be the only criterion for the healthiness of social development.

Some people perceive Buddhism as pessimistic because of its emphasis on non-violence. But is there a need for more violence in the modern world? We have already witnessed too many conflicts. People fight against each other, against everything above and below. What happens then? What do we rely on to comfort our souls when these fights bleed us dry?

Western countries are undoubtedly more powerful in respect to economic development, but social problems have nevertheless persisted. A healthy society should balance

its economic and cultural development while maintaining high moral standards. The impact of Buddhism in contemporary society is shaped by the value of its teachings. If Buddhism can provide us with food of wisdom, and bring peace and stability to the world, then it is exactly what today's society needs.

Wendao: The thing is, peace today is maintained with force of arms. Why was China constantly under invasion in the past hundreds of years? It was because we lagged behind economically – weakness leads to humiliation.

Jiqun: The nuclear weapons human beings possess are powerful enough to destroy the Earth dozens of times. Is developing atomic weapons to put each other in check the only possible way to prevent war? How can we make sure these nuclear weapons are safely kept? In fact, one more weapon in the world means one more uncertainty and one more trigger of war. Hence, weapons, however advanced they are, only fill the world with danger instead of peace and stability. The “9.11” attacks should

be sufficient as an alert to us. America boasts a powerful economy and superior weapons, yet none of those could prevent such a disaster. Just as Venerable Master Thich Nhat Hanh said, “World peace comes from people’s inner peace.”

Wendao: Will the Buddhist concepts of “negation,” “emptiness,” and “no” lead us to seclusion from society? If everyone embraced these ideas, would social progress fall into stagnation?

Jiqun: People today enjoy talking about advancement and progress. In our imagination, progress is always better than backwardness. But the progress we speak of is usually confined to the economy and technology. Amidst such thinking, we gradually lose pure folkways, traditional virtues, and leisure mentality. Is it worth pursuing progress at the cost of these values? Our happiness, after all, is more about a positive mind and a healthy body.

Unlike what people have assumed, “negation,” “emptiness,”

and “no” in the Buddhist sutras do not mean having nothing at all. “Emptiness” in Buddhism aims to negate our false cognition and obsession, which are the sources of our afflictions. Once we understand that all that exists is conditioned, with its essence lacking a self-nature, and is but an illusion of causes and conditions, we will no longer be hurt by any changes in life and thus live more at ease.

Juezhao: Can a sound legal system and good social regulations replace religions?

Jiqun: The rise of Humanism in the West denied Medieval theocracy and claimed that a good social system could solve all problems. Though efforts in the past few hundred years have gradually improved the social systems in the West, problems never ceased to arise. This is because a sound legal system can crack down on crimes but fail to eliminate their roots. Good social regulations can reduce the factors that lead to crimes but can't eradicate criminal motives. Clearly, social issues ultimately are down to every individual. How can there be social

stability when we have no inner peace and our actions are devoid of morality?

V

ANALYZING RELIGIOUS PHENOMENA

Yuanzhai: As we previously mentioned, praying and incense burning are often considered to be superstitious. Can these actions lead us to true religious beliefs?

Jiqun: Faith is a lifelong dependence that has a lasting influence. Thus, it is necessary to perform certain rituals to affirm the belief, like Christianity's baptism and Buddhism's conversion ceremony. One cannot be considered a true Christian or Buddhist without going through these processes.

To Buddhists, the importance of conversion is in the

moment when you pledge to take refuge in the Three Jewels:

Take Refuge in the Buddha for my entire life,

Take Refuge in the Dharma for my entire life,

Take Refuge in the Sangha for my entire life.

This is the pledge to take when choosing the Buddhist belief as our faith, which determines whether or not we are eligible to become Buddhists. Of course, one must follow relevant disciplines like the Five Precepts to become a qualified Buddhist. This is the threshold to differentiate Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

As to those who are not converted or ordained but only seek to burn incense or bow before the Buddha, strictly speaking, their visits to temples have nothing to do with religious belief, their worship is merely out of vague religious needs. They may adhere to folk religions and worship Buddhist monasteries, Taoist temples, or shrines without distinction. They may pray solely for material gains,

thinking, “It’s better to believe it, lest it is true.” Nevertheless, reverently praying to the Buddha can bring inner peace and sow the seeds of virtuous roots and blessings. Familiarizing yourself with the Three Jewels will make you more likely to be exposed to authentic Buddhist beliefs.

Juezhao: Some people only turn to religion for consolation when they encounter a setback in their careers or relationships. How should we view such a motive?

Jiqun: Everyone has their reason to seek religious belief. It’s only the starting point. What is important is to bring about the right belief from there. In Buddhism, it is not an encouraged motivation to merely seek emotional consolation or inner sustenance because of frustration, for it can neither induce a healthy belief nor help us explore the truth.

It is undeniable that suffering and setbacks can cultivate religious faith. Because life is fraught with suffering, we

develop the desire to escape from suffering and attain happiness. Life is fragile, and it was precisely the Buddha's sensitivity to the pain of birth, aging, illness, and death in the world that motivated him to seek the Path. Therefore, religious belief serves not as an escape from reality but as a catalyst for enhancing life and pursuing truth.

Yuanzhai: Can a person have multiple religious beliefs at the same time?

Jiqun: This is often because none of the beliefs are solid enough. If we do, it will naturally be more pure. Many religions are highly exclusive. Though Buddhism is relatively inclusive, it still demands one's undivided commitment. For instance, we can own several houses but can only sleep in one. If we spend the night wandering about, we can never rest well. The purpose of a religious belief is to help us find our true refuge, which should be the one and only.

Juezhao: There is an opinion that most Buddhist believers are not very well educated. What does this suggest?

Yuanzhai: The education we have received has always been critical of religion, leading many intellectuals to see Buddhism as a superstition. Thus, of course, they find it difficult to believe in it. Relatively, those less educated are less affected by these ideologies. But in Western countries, Buddhists are usually well-educated, which means that insufficient education among Chinese Buddhists is merely a local phenomenon rather than Buddhism's problem.

Yunhai: Before the May Fourth Movement, Confucianism was China's mainstream culture, which disapproved of Buddhism, causing educated groups to frown upon Buddhism, whereas the uneducated were less affected by such a mindset. Over time, this contributed to the misconception that only the people from the "lower class" believe in Buddhism.

In Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Myanmar, etc., the introduction of Buddhism was in sync with their cultural progression. Therefore, naturally, the ethics of Human and Devas based on Buddhism became these cultures' mainstream opinions. In Myanmar and Thailand, Buddhism is almost a nationwide belief. Everyone, regardless of their educational background, takes their faith in Buddhism as honorable. It is similar to the case in Tibet. Most cultural elites throughout Tibetan history were monks. However, it is different in the Han cultural circle as its historical ideologies conflict with Buddhist teachings.

Jiqun: The phenomenon of a large proportion of comparatively undereducated Buddhists is an atypical occurrence at a particular time and is the result of people's alienation from and ignorance of Buddhism. There were abundant social elites who were also Buddhists in history and all lands. Buddhism is established on broad philosophical structures and rigorous speculative logic. Without profound learning and cultivation, it won't be easy to

enter the Buddhist Temple of thought.

Juezhao: Today, a large proportion of Buddhists are females rather than males. What does this suggest?

Yunhai: Women are often more empathetic and show stronger perseverance when facing adversities, so they are more ready to believe in Buddhism. But due to toxic feudal and autocratic customs such as the “Three Principles and Five Virtues,” Chinese women under such old-fashioned influence had many mental defects, such as rejecting rational thinking, strong mental dependency, and weakness of will, etc. Women who aspire to practice Buddhism should be alert to these possible imperfections. Otherwise, they may fall into traps of believing without understanding or practicing, or even be subject to superstitions. Studying Buddhism requires more than believing; practicing according to the teachings is more important.

Jiqun: Overall, there are indeed more women than men

who practice Buddhism. Generally speaking, women are emotionally sophisticated and subtle and can, thus, easily feel life's suffering. Besides, women have a higher inclination to seek dependence, while men are relatively self-reliant and, thus, likely to be self-righteous. Another reason is that men tend to be career-minded, and when they give themselves up to their work, they have no time to consider life's ultimate questions. Comparatively, women may have more time and opportunity to get in contact with Buddhism.

Yuanzhai: There is a saying that teases some disciples for “enshrining the Buddha in front of their face during the first year to study Buddhism while sending the Buddha back to the West Pure Land in the year three.” Why does people's faith grow weak? As Buddhists, how can we strengthen our faith?

Juezhao: There are too many temptations in today's world. If a Buddhist has never experienced joy in receiving the Dharma and has never reaped real benefits

in practicing Buddhism, their faith will undoubtedly waver. Also, a false or impure motivation is another major factor. Buddhism aims to ultimately eradicate our suffering. The truth is, our understanding of suffering is often superficial. Learning about it from books is far from enough. We must reflect on our own lives and contemplate both our suffering and that of others to truly understand it. Suffering and obstacles can catalyze our faith and breed our determination to practice the Path.

Jiqun: Buddhist faith must be founded on renunciation and bodhicitta, which are the insurance to safeguard our faith. Many people believe in Buddhism, but have never given rise to renunciation or bodhicitta, or gradually left them behind after the beginning vows. Why does this happen? The activities of our mind need to be nurtured by various causes. Buddhist practitioners in the past emphasized the contemplation of impermanence and impurity of the human body to strengthen their determination to renunciation. Our mind falls into the mundane course when we are overwhelmed by mundane circumstances

and desires. Similarly, bodhicitta also needs to be reinforced through repeated meditations and practices. However, there is not enough emphasis on these two aspects in Chinese Buddhism.

Buddhist faith must also be established on understanding the doctrines. Many people's faith deteriorates mainly because they are hasty to begin with, lacking sufficient investigation of the Buddha's teachings. In other words, the teachings never took root in their way of thinking. How do we strengthen our faith? We may turn to rational understanding, strive for genuine realization, or cultivate a connection and resonance with Buddhas and bodhisattvas. If there is no devoted interest, true realization, or spiritual response, then it is no surprise that their faith will slowly become hollow and weak, and ultimately fade away. Though they may not declare their abandonment, they will eventually be caught in a "habitual numbness" and even turn to the pursuit of worldly fame and gains.

Therefore, Buddhist right belief must be established on

the Right View. What differentiates Buddha Dharma from non-Buddhist teachings is the Right View. But we must not stop at thinking and understanding; personal practice is also essential. With the guidance of the Right View, complemented by the mind of renunciation and bodhicitta, our faith can be continuously strengthened and consolidated, and develop to greater depths and heights.

国际静心协会、静心学堂简介

国际静心协会（简称 MPI）是 2021 年成立于瑞士苏黎世的非盈利组织，旨在向全球传播佛法智慧和禅意生活。

静心学堂为“国际静心协会”旗下的核心公益品牌，致力于传承生命觉醒教育，为现代人提供安顿身心、安身立命之道。我们推广的静心学堂课程体系，为汉传佛教济群长老以四十年修学所证，对当代佛教教育作出的探索，包括禅意生活、智慧人生和觉醒之道。同时，我们将在世界各地营造具有禅意的空间、彼此增上的氛围，为大众修学保驾护航。

“静心学堂丛书”呈现了禅意生活、智慧人生的部分课程。我们衷心希望，更多人由此了解生命觉醒的教育，共享东方智慧给人类带来的福祉。

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Mindful Peace International (MPI), established in 2021 in Zurich, Switzerland, is a non-profit organization dedicated to spreading Buddhist wisdom and promoting a Chan-inspired life globally.

The Mindful Peace Academy serves as the core public welfare brand under Mindful Peace International. We are dedicated to passing on education about life awakening and offering modern individuals ways towards physical and mental well-being, thereby helping them ground themselves and discover their life's mission. The curriculum we promote at the Mindful Peace Academy has been authenticated through forty years of study and practice by Master Jiqun, an eminent elder of Han Buddhism. It represents an exploration of contemporary Buddhist education, encompassing teachings on the Chan-inspired Life, the Wisdom for Living, and the Path to Awakening. Moreover, we are committed to creating Chan-inspired spaces and fostering mutually enriching environments worldwide to safeguard the public's learning journey.

The *Mindful Peace Academy Collection* showcases a selection of courses on the Chan-inspired Life and the Wisdom for Living. We sincerely hope that through these courses, more individuals will engage with life awakening education and share in the blessings that Eastern wisdom brings to humanity.

本书由善信

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地址: c/o TCM Glatt GmbH Richtiarkade 16 8304 Wallisellen

國家圖書館出版品預行編目 (CIP) 資料

當代宗教信仰問題的思考 / 濟群法師著.
-- 初版. -- 新北市: 大千出版社, 2024.06
面; 公分. -- (靜心學堂叢書; 11304)

ISBN 978-957-447-422-6(平裝)

1.CST: 佛教教化法 2.CST: 宗教哲學

225.87

113007977

靜心學堂叢書11304

當代宗教信仰問題的思考

作者: 濟群法師

出版者: 大千出版社

發行人: 梁崇明

登記證: 行政院新聞局局版台省業字第224号

P.O.BOX: 中和市郵政第 2-193 号信箱

發行處: 23556 新北市中和區板南路 498 号 7 樓之 2

電話: 02-2223-1391

傳真: 02-2223-1077

網址: www.darchen.com.tw

E-Mail: darchentw@gmail.com

初版: 西元 2024 年 6 月

I S B N : 978-957-447-422-6 (平裝)

結緣品 (歡迎助印流通)

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