



Michal Solomon Vasanthakumar

The following is excerpted from *Sharing Jesus Holistically in the Buddhist World*, edited by David Lim and Steve Spaulding (William Carey Library, 2005). To order copies of this book, see pages 20-21.

The Buddha and Qoheleth (author of the book of Ecclesiastes) have employed similar methodologies to analyze human existence and propose solutions to its predicament. The Buddha explained the Four Noble Truths after his enlightenment in consequence to his intense meditation on human life, which he had personally experienced, observed, and analyzed. Likewise, Qoheleth's depictions are based on his own experiences and observations. Hence, both have discovered similar facts about human life, but analyzed and proposed solutions differently according to their religious and cultural contexts. Since the Buddha has denied the existence of God and human soul, his doctrines do not have any reference to these concepts. Qoheleth, however, due to his Hebraic religious background, had made references to these aspects. Nevertheless, Buddhists can appreciate and comprehend Qoheleth's writings, due to their familiarity of the similar analysis of the Buddha

Human Desires and Our Common Predicament

... Like the Buddha, Qoheleth also sees human desires as the root cause for the human predicament. Though he does not express it in such phraseology, his description resembles the explanation of the Buddha. According to Qoheleth's Hebraic orientation, human cravings or desires are nothing other than human will or selfish motivations in opposition to the divine will. Instead of constantly seeking and living according to the will of God as the Bible admonishes, people live the way they want, thus bringing sorrow and lack of satisfaction into their lives. This type of life could be described in Buddhist way of thinking as life conditioned by cravings. It is a life conditioned and characterized by human desires only.

Qoheleth describes such a life in reference to "under the sun", a phrase that occurs nowhere in the Bible except in the book of Ecclesiastes. Like the term *hebel*, this expression is an important concept in the

book of Ecclesiastes, used by Qoheleth twenty-nine times. Qoheleth thus restricts his remarks to terrestrial human activity and work. Qoheleth's "frequent use of the phrase 'under the sun' highlights the restricted scope of his inquiry. His worldview does not allow him to take a transcendent yet immanent God into consideration in his quest for meaning." Hence Qoheleth's approach and that of the Buddha were almost the same. Both have tried to find meaning in human life without considering God's dealings in human affairs. For the Buddha human desires bring sorrows and frustrations, and for Qoheleth human desires are godless self-oriented motivations

Buddhists and the Laws of God

The Bible clearly teaches that God has revealed himself to all human beings, which is theologically known as general revelation. Thus, God's existence and some of his attributes are known to all human beings, and "the basic requirements of the law are stamped on human hearts." Therefore, it could be concluded that the moral teachings of the Buddha were related to this phenomenal and mysterious work of God in human hearts despite his denial of God. By explaining the nature of the ethical teachings of the Buddha via general revelation, Christians can communicate the commandments of God to Buddhists. It could be done by pointing out the similarities of the ethical teachings of the Buddha and those that are found in the Bible. In fact, many have seen the similar teachings of both religions but wrongly concluded this phenomenon is Buddhist influence on the biblical writings. The similarities were not necessarily due to such influences, but were mainly due to the general revelation of God. 🌐

Both Qoheleth and the Buddha have tried to find meaning in life without considering God's dealing in human affairs.