

Question 37:

One of my working colleagues believes in Islam religion. She said that dependent origination/kamma/cause and effect philosophy described in Buddhism cannot give rise to the creation of the human body with so many different and difficult biological and physiological and physical functions, and that has been done by God with supernatural powers, followed by the fact that you will be judged after your death. She also mentioned that the pain and suffering in this world is solely due to the fact that God is testing you whether you can withstand it or not. I personally do not agree with my friend's one creator philosophy. So how can I convince that my belief in Buddhist Philosophy is correct for my own intellectual satisfaction? *From J. Wright*

Answer:

There is no one "correct" view, although there are "right" or "skillful" views which are more helpful for a person of a particular faith to purify his mind than other views. All views of creation are taught by words attempting to express a perspective of Truth which cannot be fully comprehended by the unenlightened human mind that is only able to understand what it has absorbed through the senses. A metaphysical concept may be described in several ways so that it is comprehensible to a person, through similes and analogies to what is familiar. Many religions explain the source of creation as a supernatural being with a human form and qualities, who loves, judges, tests and rewards. Islam does not accept any image of God, avoiding a delusion of God as merely a powerful humanlike spirit, but retains the idea of God as a being separate from us and having qualities such as mercy, being pleased, punishing and rewarding.

The Buddha did not teach that there is one time of creation, but that instead worlds contract and expand in cycles. The Buddha described in the Agganna Sutta (Digha Nikaya 27) a concept of creation in the context of the contraction and expansion of this world. He says that at the time of contraction, beings were mostly existing in a delightful heaven-world for a very long time. When the world began to expand again, some of those beings, though unenlightened, dwelled happily as shining celestial beings in this world which was just a mass of water with no light or stars, and no way to measure time. After a long time "savory earth" spread over the water. A being of a greedy nature tasted the "savory earth" and craving arose in it, and other beings followed his cue, and soon their radiance disappeared, after which the sun and moon appeared, making time become distinguishable. Foods began to appear, beginning with tasty fungus (mushroom), then vines, then rice. As the beings ate these foods they developed coarser bodies, distinct from each other, and coarse qualities of hatred, jealousy, arrogance and grief arose, and eventually sex organs, and lust. The beings then developed more differences and qualities. This description of creation includes symbolism, like creation stories of other religions, to convey concepts that were beyond the comprehension of people thousands of years ago. It suggests, however, that the human form is similar to the forms of some beings that live in heaven-worlds, and did not evolve by random chance.

Dependent origination explains the conditional relationship of all phenomena, and is not a creation or a beginning-of-the-world theory. It states that from ignorance arises volitions (or karma formations), from which arises consciousness, from which arises mentality-materiality, from which arises the five sense organs and mind-consciousness, from which arises the sensory mental impression, from which arises feeling, from which arises craving, from which arises clinging, and so on. The *Visuddhi Magga* states that ignorance is not causeless, and is not the

root cause of the world, but is figuratively treated as a root cause, being a “starting point in an exposition of the round of becoming.” The Buddha has given both ignorance and craving for becoming as starting points in the round of becoming; he has said that there is no first beginning of ignorance and ignorance has as its condition the craving for becoming, and there is no first beginning of craving for becoming. *Visuddhi Magga* (XVII, 36-38).

The Buddha’s explanation of dependent origination does not address divine power. However, one could take the perspective that any change, arising (such as the arising of volitional formations from ignorance) or cessation, is energy or divine power. Thus there may be a way of explaining the arising of phenomena which encompasses both the concept of the divine and that of dependent origination. However few individuals wish to attempt to do so, as there is a caution in *Visuddhi Magga* (XVII 25), that it is inherently difficult to comment on dependent origination, that the meaning of dependent origination should not be commented on rashly, should not misrepresent the teachers, should not advertise one’s own standpoint or quarrel with the standpoint of others or distort the suttas.

Whichever perspective is most helpful to an individual to understand suffering - to believe that God is testing you, or that your past bad actions caused the pain to arise, or that a divine power or aspect of God has caused the pain to arise at a certain time - the result should be to utilize the experience of pain and suffering to develop good qualities such as fortitude and compassion. As a person gains more insight, his understanding may change or become less rigid. Buddhism is concerned not with establishing who has the correct view but instead with conveying a view which leads a person away from craving, aversion, and delusion and toward purity of mind.