

A Response to “Can a Buddhist Become a Mason?” By Bro. Todd Michalak

There are three questions one must answer in the affirmative if one wishes to become a Mason¹ in Ontario, Canada. In order of the paper presented by W:. Bro. Steve Hampton² these are as follows:

1. “Do you believe in the existence of a Supreme Being?”
2. “Do you believe that this Supreme Being has revealed it’s will to Man?”
3. “Do you believe this Supreme Being punishes vice and rewards virtue?”

In the prior paper the conclusion reached by the author was negative. The stated reasons for his conclusions being that Buddhists, to his mind, have to “see” and not just “believe” to have a set notion of a Supreme Being. Due to a lack of a set belief in “God” the second question could not be answered in the affirmative. The third question is answered negatively because he stated Karma was independent of a Supreme Being, therefore not vectored by one. I will show in kind exactly how a Buddhist can be a Mason, by answering and explaining all three questions in kind, from the mind and point of view of a Buddhist. I will also show that, not only are Buddhists able to be Masons, but all Masons are also Buddhists. This may seem shocking, but it is as it is.

The first question: “Do you believe in the existence of a Supreme Being?”

We must look at this question very closely and break it down carefully. There is much pre-supposed in it, and we must look deeply to see how an answer may be formed in the affirmative at the deepest levels of honesty and truth.

What are you...really? Have you really looked and considered this? Are we separate from God? Must we be to believe in it? Does the question state an implied separation between us and a Supreme Being so “we” can believe in “it?” What does it mean to exist? What is IT that we mean when we say Supreme Being? I will answer from the perspective of a Buddhist.

What are we really? Well, Buddhists have a Sutra, “The Diamond Sutra.” (A Sutra is like a small scroll or wise book studied by students.) And it states the belief that all things are interconnected-and interpenetrated by one another. Like a bunch of diamonds strung together and connected in every way. We, as humans, are also inter-reliant on one another and parts of a whole existence. Enlightenment experiences are often glimpses of this True Nature. How can this be shown to be true and why is it important to attain an affirmative response to question one? We shall see.

If Buddhists are correct then we must be greater than what we may currently think we are. Most people here probably believe that the body ends at the skin. In other

¹ In the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York there are two questions one must answer affirmatively to become a Mason: (1) Do you believe in the existence of one ever living and true God? (2) Do you believe in the immortality of the soul?

² W:. Bro. Steve Hampton is a member of Templum Fidelis Lodge No. 746 in Bath, Ontario, Canada

words, we can control ourselves and are responsible for the things the “skin-in” does. If Brother Dan throws a brick through a car window it is easy for him to say “I did that.” It is also seemingly true that if Brother Dan is sick with a cold that Brother Jon is not sick with a cold, he does not have a cold at that time from his “skin-in.” They seem so easily separate and little argument is generally had about this. However this point of view is not correct by virtue of the Diamond Sutra.

Why? Because we are not just the “skin-in.” It is obvious that our beating hearts are necessary for us to be in an “alive condition.” Our minds and brains must function for existence to be perceived by us and life to be sensed. Destroy the heart or smash the brain to bits and what we call our bodies will die, and that single point of reference is gone. We can say that the heart and brain are thus part of us; both removals would change our state of being to a new form, whatever that may be. I shall simply call it death. But what about the “skin out?” Is that part of us in the same way and thus a part of us? Buddhists would say yes. We are “interdependent on our environment” and it is a necessary part of us.

See what would happen to our “skin-in” if the sun exploded or all the air was sucked out of this room. Would we survive? Of course not. We would change form for sure. The same would happen if the Earth thrust us off itself and our bodies were made to drift into open space. Thus, we are much more than the “skin in.” We are much more universal and our contingent bodies are what we need and see all around us. Interdependent and interconnected. Why is this helping to show that “I” can believe in a Supreme Being?

If we can perceive ourselves from the point of view of the vast, we can then open to knowing the vast. The practices start opening the mind to “seeing” God and do not just relegate one to intellectually “believing” in God. Buddhism stresses the personal journey for a being, and the practices and Sutras are meant for deep self-exploration and one’s own journey to touching the ultimate. That is why many questions are met with silence. You ARE in your silence.

Thus personal experience of God, through the realization we are not just our “crude matter” starts a deprogramming of the mind that will eventually lead to a deep personal relationship with all that lies without the body. Here, one may find God and a true, solid, belief in it.

Our second question: “Do you believe this Supreme Being has revealed it’s will to Man?”

As one’s connection grows to this ultimate interconnection, the will of the “Light” becomes personally clearer. The “calm mind” is a receiver of the Supreme Being’s will. It is more than just a personal conscience I speak of, though that director inside us is a great start and indicator of what I speak of. Meditation practice starts a change in the body/mind that we are from the “skin in” in ownership of. Science has run experiments to this effect by monitored the types of waves that the brains of meditation masters

produce. A state of calm clarity and deep sense of being is cultivated by this practice and that switches the way that the mind actually perceives the world. Buddhists learn to “receive” with the mind/body and share existence with all things around them in a very real and different way than when they first started practice. For example, the mind of Brother Dan will look out of its eyes and see a “gavel” on a pedestal. The information “gavel” is then assigned to the gavel and the information bounces back into his eyes and the brain receives the knowledge that the gavel exists on the pedestal. Brother Dan is constantly stabbing out at the world, interpreting and assigning values to things and sucking that information back into the mind/body. This is a lot of work, and clouds the experience “what is.”

Conversely, Buddhists learn to simply accept the gentle information pushed into the eyes without the active assigning of values and constant action of “perceiving-out” of the programmed brain. This is similar to a baby being new to the world. The world just “is” and the mind/body is connected and a settled part of it. The mind is much more silent and quiet. This state allows for the will of the Supreme Being to whisper its directions to a practitioner. Without all the active static and work of perceiving and attacking and labeling and having a song in one’s head and thinking about the brother in the suit across the way who is wearing the jewel you want to wear, and the shoes of the other brother that keep tapping, and where am I going to go get the milk and bread my kid needs after lodge, Tops or Wegmans?...and why is my leg asleep?...STATIC in the radio signal of the mind-INTERFERENCE. Quiet minds are better receivers of the will of a Supreme Being and one must really have such a brain to be in any TRUE meaningful contact. Meditation, prayer, and repetitive Mantras all focus and hone this type of state. Thus Buddhists can certainly lay claim to being able to hear and even feel the will of God, through personal experience with the aid of practice.

All things are interconnected, we all share energy and life with each other. All sentient beings are important and all are a part of God. The more we receive the world the more sensitive to the way we affect things around us we become. This leads us to the third query to answer.

“Do you believe this Supreme Being punishes vice and rewards virtue?”

Karma is a good place to start and sensitivity to all things we affect around us leads to a closer understanding of how this punishment and reward reality works. We do not choose how we feel or how we are affected by what we do, but the happening of how we feel after an act is instantaneous as well as forever reaching. Karma is cultivated in many Buddhist countries. One in particular is the Ch’an or Chinese Buddhism. Why is it cultivated? Simply, the more light we are responsible for adding to the world by doing good things and healing all things around us literally the better our “Universal” body is doing. Literally the world becomes healthy. The body/mind of the individual is responsible for its actions but the mechanism for how it all works in the interconnections of reality are a part of a more divine math than the individual can be privy to. Karma may be produced by a being but its effects are interconnected by the web of something far vaster. Both “negative” and “positive” Karma is actually hoped to be overcome at a

final stage of consciousness (merging with all the universe and being “blown out” of the Karmic re-birth³ cycle). But while in the humanistic sway of it Karma Buddhists certainly receive immediate and personal negative and damaging experiences by doing negative and damaging things and watching them unfold in the future due to their past actions. By the simple act of doing something mean to somebody and receiving the feelings and waves of energy from the person or thing, one becomes sensitive too. Through Buddhist practice this is undeniable.

By studying the relationships of what actions we choose and how they effect a response in our interconnected world that we are more and more personally/ energetically intimate with as our practice deepens, it leads to a direct interdependent experience that quickly shows the “will of God” and how punishment and reward ACTUALLY WORKS – in a direct and personally undeniable way – because you ARE the direct response in a personally undeniable way. One is simply TOO CONNECTED to the true world we think is outside our bodies to have any defense to doing anything bad without an immediate sharing of the experience we have just created. The same is true for virtue actions. A smile in others brightens all the light around and inside us exactly at that moment. God takes care of how it rolls from that second forward in the sharing web way of the universe. Really, the connections between “You” and the “World” blur to the point where one learns there is no difference between them. The reason one thing feels bad or good is reliant on the math that some Supreme Being must have put in place for us to be able to perceive and run our lives accordingly, for I know I could not have done all that kind of cause-effect consequence reality on my own.

Thus, it is very possible that the doctrines and training of a Buddhist can lead to him being able to answer all three questions of membership in the affirmative. From a very real and personal place which becomes a necessarily interdependent point of view-it is quite easy to see how it can happen. To summarize: our training leads us to personal experiences of a Supreme Being existing. We become quiet-minded, which leads us to hearing the directives of the Supreme Being and we feel the effects of the laws of cause effect constructed by the Supreme Being and they affect the practitioner immediately due to the development of the connective and experiential mind developed through hard training and practice. In a final point and ultimate proof – I myself am a Mason – and happen to be a Buddhist. By that account alone we are able to prove that such a condition exists, and because I am all others and they a part of me, and I a part of them; so all Buddhists become Masons and all Masons Buddhists. There is no separation.

³ Karmic rebirth affirmatively answers the question of belief in the immortality of the soul.