

The Psychological Value of Confession in Buddhism and Christianity

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Abstract

'Confession' can be defined as 'admitting that you have done something wrong or illegal'. With reference to the religious aspect, it can be observed when a Christian tells God or, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, tells a priest formally and privately, what they have done wrong so that they can be forgiven. The concept of Confession can be seen in Buddhism too. In Mahayana Buddhism everyone has the thought of enlightenment (Bodhicitta), but it is considered to be in a state of sleep. To wake it up, eight preliminary devotional practices (anuttarapūjā) should be fulfilled, and it is tantamount to confession of sins (pāpadesanā) in front of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. The Theravadic Buddhist tradition, confession alone cannot absolve a person totally. The law of 'Karma' will prevail until the attainment of Nibbana.

In Christianity, especially in Catholic teaching, the Sacrament of Penance is the method of the Church by which individual men and women confess sins committed after baptism and have them absolved by God through the administration of a Priest. At the same time, the Bible calls upon believers to confess their sins (1 John 1:9).

The present research attempts to study how far confession can be applied to solve social issues in the current society. Besides, this is a qualitative research based on literature. Moreover, findings were philosophically analyzed in order to assess the psychological value the practice of confession. If the human beings of the society are ready to accept their unrighteous activities as offences, it helps to make a righteous society.

Introduction and Research Problem

Attaining Enlightenment is the ultimate goal of both Mahayana as well as Theravada Buddhists. With reference to Mahayana the Bodhicaryāvatāra, everyone has the thought of enlightenment (Bodhicitta), but it is considered to be sleeping.

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To wake it up, eight preliminary devotional practices (anuttarapūjā) should be fulfilled. Moreover, the fourth practice is confession of sins (pāpadesanā) in front of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas., Furthermore, this practice is clearly elaborated in the 2nd chapter of Bodhicaryāvatāra as follows. “Whatever evil, on the endless wheel of rebirth or simply right here, whatever evil was committed by me, an animal, or caused to be committed and whatever was enjoyed foolishly, ending in self-destruction, that evil, I confess, stricken with remorseful feeling.”

In Christianity, especially in Catholic teaching, the Sacrament of Penance is the method of the Church by which individual men and women confess sins committed after baptism and have them absolved by God through the consultation of a Priest. There are numerous statements related to the confession in the Bible. Selected two quotations, are given as follows. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). Healing is a much important activity not only in religious aspect, but also in day to day life.

Both Buddhism and Christianity explain their teachings on confession that it can be practiced by lay and clergy in day to day life. The present research attempts to study how far this concept can be applied to solve social issues in the current society in terms of its psychological value.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research based on literature. Information has been collected from the primary sources in Buddhism and Christianity and the relevant secondary sources and articles related to the field. Findings were philosophically analyzed in order to assess the psychological value of confession.

Discussion

In relation to the Nibbedika sutta of Anguttaranikāya intention is named as the action. "Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect. Therefore, we have to pay much attention to the mind than the action when we engage in any activity. Bāla vagga of Dhammapada explain the role of mind. That deed is not well done, if one has to repent for having done it, and if, with a tearful face, one has to weep as a result of that deed. That deed is well done if one has not to repent for having done it, and if one is delightful and happy with the result of that deed. With reference to the Vanaropa sutta of Samyuktanikaya there are a few activities that merit grows. It is clearly mentioned in the sutta as follows. They who plant orchards and gardens, plant groves, build bridges, set up sheds by the roadside with drinking water for the travellers, sink

wells or build reservoirs, put up various forms of shelter for the public, are those in whom merit grows by day and by night. The reason behind this is the reflection. Whatever we reflect again it grows whether it is either merits or demerits. As a result of confession de-meritorious activities can be minimized. It helps to stop the growth of demerits.

Conclusion

Psychological value of the practice of confession is significant. If the human beings are ready to accept their unrighteous activities as offences, it helps to create a righteous society. And also acceptance is a noble human quality, by which unrighteous activities in the society can be controlled as well as it helps a lot to rehabilitate the society.

Keywords: Buddhism, Christianity, Confession, Psychological Value

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