

# The Stigma of Religious Life according to the Buddhist Perspective: Religious Beliefs' Study Scope

**BITARA**Volume 4, Issue 4, 2021: 102-114  
© The Author(s) 2021  
e-ISSN: 2600-9080  
<http://www.bitarajournal.com>

Halimahtul Sa'diyah Mohamad,<sup>1</sup> Jaffary Awang,<sup>1</sup>  
Kamaruddin Salleh<sup>1</sup> & Zaizul Ab Rahman<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The stigma of religious life becomes prominent in the globalisation epoch with growing religious followers, including Buddhism. It is on the list of the largest religions in the world. Nevertheless, Buddhism does not believe in God but upholds moral values as the basis in its teachings. This research examined the religious life that motivates Buddhists to practice it in their lives. Based on the literature analysis, the study reported that apart from the basic principles believed to be the guide of life, the Buddha encouraged his followers to ensure the truth of teaching obtained before practicing it to avoid conflict with Buddhist teachings and motivated them to do good. Besides, Buddha advised his followers to clear their minds from destructive elements that could harm their thoughts. Thus, Buddhists should concentrate on religious life so that the Noble Eightfold Path and The Five Precepts taught by the Buddha could be implemented holistically by his religious followers instead of adopting specific parts in practicing religious teachings in daily life.

## Keywords:

Religious life; religious beliefs; religious practices; Buddha

## Cite This Article:

Halimahtul Sa'diyah Mohamad, Jaffary Awang, Kamaruddin Salleh & Zaizul Ab Rahman. 2021. The stigma of religious life according to the Buddhist perspective: Religious beliefs' study scope. *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 4(4): 102-114.

## Introduction

The stigma of religious life in the Buddhist perspective is unique from other religions. This religion concentrates on philosophical teachings that interpret God's concept of divinity differently from other religions by assuming that all existence occurs naturally. It complicates the Buddhists in placing Buddhism as a religion but upholding moral values (Chummi Ratanawaraha 1986). Although there are obstacles in justifying the teachings of Buddhism that there is no God (Durkheim 1947), yet, according to world statistics, Buddhism is one of the most famous religions in the world with a top-five position in the world ranking of Christian 31.4%, Muslim 23.2%, Hindu 15% and Buddhist 7.1%. Then, it is followed by other religions

<sup>1</sup> Pusat Kajian Usuluddin dan Falsafah, Fakulti Pengajian Islam, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA.

## Corresponding Author:

Jaffary Awang, Pusat Kajian Usuluddin dan Falsafah, Fakulti Pengajian Islam, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA.

\*e-mel: [jaffary@unisza.edu.my](mailto:jaffary@unisza.edu.my)

from the world's population, estimated at 7,684,292,383 ("The World Factbook" 2018). This matter has been discussed by (K. Sri Dhammananda 1996), who explained that the world's significant religions constantly developed due to the original teachings of their respective founders. They proved the simplicity, restraint, truth, and darkness eroded or ignored, which do not influence their followers. Materialistic values appeal to them more than moral and spiritual values. Chumni Ratanawaraha (1986), described that Buddhists do not practice Buddhism because the Buddhism mentioned only involve its philosophy or logic stances. Therefore, Buddhists need to get back on the right track to exercise Buddhism in their lives by placing religion as a principle that becomes a fundamental practice in overcoming the problems they face. It is vital as philosophy cannot solve problems because its theory never ends, and, at the same time, one sees the scientific method needs to be applied in religious practice so that the scope and nature of the problem can be determined. Such practices can deliver happiness to human beings for a lifetime (Chumni Ratanawaraha 1986).

The context of the issues of religion and philosophy highlighted proves that believers are confused in practicing Buddhism to claim that theory-based Buddhism regularly changes and cannot solve their problems. Thus, they need fresh methods for practicing their religion. To solve the confusion related to the religious and philosophical issues underlined, there are components in the teachings of Buddhism that are taught to its followers to understand how religious life is in the context of Buddhism.

## **Dimensions of Religious Life according to the Buddhist Perspective**

Religious life is a form of life (Schneiders 2015) that arises from religious phenomena throughout life. Orrù et al. (2016) mentioned in response to Durkheim's 1912 work on religious life that is still relevant in this century (Orrù et al. 2016). Given different circumstances, in the context of Buddhism, religious phenomena also exist even based on Buddhist philosophy alone. K. Sri Dhammananda (1994) defined religious life referring to the following situations: "Venerable Ananda: Half of this in religion consist in righteous friendship, righteous intimacy, righteous association." The Exalted One: "... Not so, Ananda! The whole of this life in religion consists in righteous friendship, righteous intimacy, righteous association." (~SI: 88; S.V:2)

In the interpretation of religious life, Venerable Ananda explained that part of religious life is to have good relations, whether with other individuals, spouses, or society. Nonetheless, some think that religious life should be comprehensive; they should hold a good relationship with each other and not take only part of it. It notes that its followers should practice religious life holistically instead of choosing only certain parts in performing religious practices. Hence, a question arises: Does what the Buddha brings holistic given that the teachings of the Buddha focused on matters related to moral values that are more philosophical? The key lies in the notion of religious belief, which is the foundation of Buddhist teachings.

## Scope of Religious Beliefs according to the Buddhist Perspective

Beliefs are central to the Buddhist perspective as the corpus of Buddhist beliefs proposed 'does not believe in anything' (K. Sri Dhammananda 2002a). However, beliefs are believed through the social and life history that underlies religious beliefs (Robert 2002). It is in line with the classical scholar Durkheim (1947), who described the change of religious phenomena occurring naturally (Berger 1967; Cadge 2017). It is possible by backing up such phenomena as beliefs and practices deemed sacred and to be defended by those who have a relationship with something, whether it is good or bad for them. Accordingly, beliefs are also associated with specific objects in deciding whether practices are complex or straightforward. In this case, a sacred object is not a determinant of the purity of the object, but it foregrounds how one sees an object, whether it is considered sacred or not. It is imperative that Buddhism believes no God but acknowledges sacred objects such as forms of noble truth and derive other practices from it. Based on this concept, Buddhists place their faith in the religion they practice even though the Buddha is not a God or a prophet or an incarnation of a God but considered '*the peerless teacher of gods and men*' (Nyanatiloka 2015).

The concept brought by Durkheim has been argued by Herbrechtsmeier (2006), who proposed that belief and respect for human beings cannot be understood as a critical feature of religious phenomena by claiming that essential things in Buddhism do not depend on human respect while 'philosophy' needs to be systematically structured to see the difference between 'religion' and 'philosophy'. Similarly, the Buddhist doctrines which asserted reality but are 'insincere' in providing a conceptual context for understanding beings, and these concepts are inconsistent with the definition of religion understood by human beings. This issue becomes vital given that other views concluded belief in a perspective somewhat contradictory to what was stated by Durkheim 1947 and Herbrechtsmeier 2006. In comparison with classical and contemporary scholarly statements, Lu & Gao (2016) maintained that belief symbolises belief in Buddha, karma, and rebirth. This idea is important to Buddha and his teachings. Nevertheless, there are differences of opinion on the criteria in determining the concept of religious belief. K. Sri Dhammananda (2002a) declared that Buddha's belief in karma and rebirth is too general. Buddha delivered a logical explanation, introduced common sense to this belief, and submits it as natural cause and effect law. Hence, Buddha also did not disregard sincere religious beliefs or practices because he highly valued truth throughout. (K. Sri Dhammananda 2002a).

In his review of beliefs, (Mair 2013) hypothesised against those who may not know about religion but believe in something supernatural. In other words, a religious belief reflects one's commitment to do a job or something that is not literal, symbolic, ethical, or social. Nevertheless, some views perceive faith as a way of how religion is communicated to others. Through it, religion can be understood by believers (Robert 2002). Chummi Ratanawaraha (1986) stated that although the teachings of the Buddha are based on philosophical theories, the theories brought by the Buddha become the belief of his followers. Nevertheless, following the teachings conveyed by the Buddha, he encourages his followers to question what the teacher teaches and not accept the teachings without knowing the teachings learned even though he

believed that all beings have no shortcomings. Hence, it confirms that the Buddha placed high faith in human beings. It is based on the reality of what the Buddha realised; questioning a piece of news, tradition, and rumor is better than believing it without a thorough check. It applies too to the authority of religious texts and matters that use logic alone. Besides, teachings acquired through the judgment of reason alone cannot be easily trusted unless what is acquired is genuinely believed to be of its goodness by instructing its adherents to be a source of knowledge for oneself (Buddhist et al. N.d.). Therefore, it demonstrates that the Buddha taught his followers not to believe in something before checking its authenticity immediately and encourages them to do good deeds based on what they believe.

Although some scholars possess various views on religious beliefs, the Buddha outlined guidelines as the basis of Buddhist teachings for the Buddhist community. Peter D. Santina (1984) revealed that Buddhist teachings included criteria such as the Buddhist life, The Fourth Noble Truth and The Noble Eightfold Path. In this regard, Upa. Sasanasena Seng Hansen (2008) briefly described the teachings of Buddhism in 'The Dhammapada 183' as follows: "... Do not do evil, add good, purify the mind, this is the teaching of the Buddhas" 'The Dhammapada 183' (Upa. Sasanasena Seng Hansen 2008).

Based on a simple expression expressed by the Buddha, this illustrates that the Buddha taught his believers to do good (Lama 2010) and purify the mind from thinking of negative things. It confirms that the Buddha encouraged his believers to do good by rejecting adverse information that can harm the mind. Consequently, to understand the concept of belief at the core of religious life, one must recognise the Buddha, The Four Noble Truths, The Noble Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts of Buddhism, and Belief in the Law of Karma and Belief in Rebirth. Although the Buddha did not oblige his followers to practice the teachings of the Buddha, he still taught about his teachings so that the believers could understand the essence. Therefore, to know and understand what the teachings of the Buddha are, one needs to recognise who is Buddha first.

## **Who is the Buddha?**

Based on the conclusions of empirical studies that examined who the Buddha is, Buddha is not God and not a prophet or incarnation of God but a human being who 'attained to Final Deliverance and Perfect Wisdom' through his efforts (Nyanatiloka 2015). Buddha is a title given to an individual who attains enlightenment. There is more than one. Nonetheless, according to the era's history, only one known Buddha existed around the 6th century BC; Gautama Buddha. He lived in the Northern part of India. Gautama's real name was Siddharta, while Gautama was his family name approximately existed around 563 BC to 547 BC. He dedicated his entire life to teaching. The Buddha considered himself a teacher and the person responsible for introducing the spiritual method. This response is considered the most rational for the Buddha. Thus, it is evident that the Buddha reformed the customs, religious duties, ceremonies and ethics, and the way of life at the time (Upa. Sasanasena Seng Hansen 2008). However, the Buddha taught his followers to see everything, observe phenomena, and not rely on something that cannot be experienced by every individual (K. Sri Dhammananda 2002a). Nevertheless, in basic teachings of philosophy and psychology, it is illogical to say that the

Buddha copied ideas from the religions that existed at that time, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, Dependent Origination, and Nirvana. These ideas were undiscovered before his arrival (K. Sri Dhammananda 2002a).

Hence, Buddha has become a highly respected person. As a mark of respect and remembrance to him, the statues were built as religious symbols and emblems for Buddhists. In addition, he was also considered a doctor to treat diseases. However, its connection to God's faith found in the teachings of Buddhism is vague. It has been argued that if a believer believes in the existence of God and could prove His existence, he could adhere to the teachings, but he must not force others to do so (Rogayah Estar Mohamad 1999).

The study's findings determined that the concept of divinity in Buddhism is considered a dysfunctional guardian of nature and assumes all beings in this universe exist naturally without a Creator. They believe that God is nonsense because sometimes a person's desire is obtained without asking for it. Thus, the Buddha encouraged his believers to strive without expecting others and other elements to believe and do something. They believe no one created this life and consistently adhered to cause and effect and human behavior (Rogayah Estar Mohamad 1999). Therefore, it establishes that the Buddha rejected the existence of God and assumed the existence of God to be invalid, lacking in evidence and pointless. Hence, the presence of God does not give meaning to human life (Alasdair 2012; K. Sri Dhammananda 2002b). Based on what has been discussed, the Four Noble Truths are the framework of the beginning of Buddhist teachings. What are the Four Noble Truths that are the source of ideas/inspiration (underlying) the emergence of Buddhist teachings?

## **Basic Aspirations of the Emergence of Buddhism: (The Four Noble Truths)**

The Four Noble Truths often creates question mark, thus raising some of the underlying questions of Buddhism such as 'What is the meaning of life?' Moreover, 'What happens after death?'. This question occurs because the Buddha tried to probe the reality of temporary human existence by going through suffering (Holden 2013). Nevertheless, to free oneself from that suffering, it is essential to go through The Four Noble Truths (Upa. Sasanasena Seng Hansen 2008), precisely the Noble Truth about *Dukkha* (in Pali: *dukkha*; in Sanskrit: *duhkha*), the Noble Truth about the cause from *Dukkha*, the Noble Truth about the end *Dukkha* and the Noble Truth about the path to the disappearance of *Dukkha*.

Accordingly, the connotation of *Dukkha* is translated as forms of mental and physical related pain and connected to birth, death, disease, satisfaction, and deprivation of not having what is desired. Thus, it illustrates the emphasis of Buddhism on the suffering that is part of human life that causes some in society to conclude that it is a negative or despondent religion and lack of confidence in the teachings of Buddhism (Peter D. Santina 1984). Holden (2013) emphasised that by following one's existence, one can attain actual happiness and motivate one to change their life with more positive thinking. It coincides with the Upa analogy. Sasanasena Seng Hansen (2008) concluded that Buddhist teachings as practical teachings.

The analogy established from the birth of ideas used as a basis for a belief in religious teaching without an authentic source will always change according to one's understanding. It

prompts the thoughts of what will happen if the patients' diseases offer no hope of being cured? Will they be left to suffer just like that without treatment? Contrary to Buddha's teachings, *Dukkha* (suffering) will eventually lead to *Sukkhā* (pleasure). No matter what one feels through the physical senses, and the mind, it will all disappear naturally (Henning 2002).

The Buddha suggested that to end '*Dukkha*', it is necessary to attain '*Nibbana*'. Nevertheless, reaching the level of '*Nibbana*' is complicated. One needs to go through arduous paths and sufferings as the Buddha himself suffered for about six years (Noss. Davids. & Grangaard 1999) before attaining enlightenment, let alone reaching the level of '*Nibbana*'. Thus, it motivates one to think about getting rid of the '*Dukkha*' taught by the Buddha? The answer is humans need to perform good behaviors such as those found in The Noble Eightfold Path to eliminate all suffering (Upa. Sasanasena Seng Hansen 2008). Is practicing The Noble Eightfold Path remove all the suffering that Buddhists go through?

## **Ways to Get Rid of All Suffering and Agonise: (The Noble Eightfold Path)**

The Noble Eightfold Path emerges as a solution for freeing oneself from suffering and living a happy life (K. Sri Dhammananda 2002a). It is possible by overcoming suffering and thinking of others above oneself to attain happiness (Holden 2013). Therefore, this path of liberation requires one to go through a sound and universally applicable training system covering Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration, Right Understanding Wisdom and Right Thoughts (Henning 2002; K. Sri Dhammananda 2002c; Silva nd) by understanding the analogies taught by the Buddha as the True View. It becomes the solution for suffering. Right View proposed to understand something with the Rightness that happens in daily life.

To express the Right View, the human attitude must be driven by curiosity. One cannot simply trust others and believe blindly. As the saying goes, "You reap what you sow". It implies that believers need to ensure that everything is understood correctly and accurately. Understanding something needs one to investigate in advance so that what is obtained is authentic and trustworthy (Silva n.d.). Besides, the Right Mindfulness can also help cultivate a good and positive attitude and bring happiness to oneself and others because one's mind will influence his speech, behavior and thoughts, and it should be filled with love and affection. (Silva n.d.).

To cultivate the Right Mindfulness, one needs to think first before speaking, only talk about beneficial things, and speak politely. The mouth and tongue work like a sharp knife. If one misuses it, it can hurt others and oneself. Before speaking, one needs to ask oneself, "Am I speaking the truth? Am I speaking politely? Are my words useful to others? Am I speaking with the right intention? Am I speaking appropriately according to the time and place? More importantly, one should refrain from lying, spreading rumors, hurting others and talking about worthless things (Silva n.d.).

Practicing Right Mindfulness should be followed by the Right Action. One should not follow the actions of others and should refrain from committing acts that can cause suffering to others, such as stealing, killing, and committing adultery. Similarly, to Confucius, a Chinese

philosopher once said: “Do not do something to others if you do not like others to do it to you.” (Silva n.d.). It signifies that the believer should always do good to others so that others do not harm them. It reflects the saying, ‘You reap what you sow’. It then allows the concept of Right Action to be applied in life properly.

The concept even applies in Right Livelihood. When earning a living, Buddhists are advised that every work done must not harm others. It is essential to maintain security and peace to others without persecution and oppression of others. Some of the critical things taught by the Buddha are not to trade weapons, slaughter animals, practice enslavement, sell liquor and sell poison. These five types of jobs should be avoided because these jobs produce suffering and misery to others and animals and cause chaos in society. Therefore, followers must have a legal job that does not cause suffering and hurt others (Silva n.d.).

Next, in discussing Righteous Effort, it is vital to learn that it covers the job and the development of the mind and spirituality and shapes good behavior. Accomplishing an ‘effort’ is essential because, without effort, one will not get the result. An effort should be made in a calm and determined atmosphere. To achieve Righteous Effort, there are four critical things that the Buddha focused on, explicitly refraining from negative thoughts (unholy), eliminating negative thoughts (unholy), always cultivating positive thoughts (holy thoughts) by maintaining and developing positive thoughts (holy mind). These criteria become indispensable ingredients in cultivating positive thinking (holy mind) by removing harmful elements from controlling the mind to achieve happiness and success in life.

Furthermore, to complete the elements of Righteous Effort, awareness becomes an inherent basis in accomplishing something. Right Concentration means always being aware of what is being done in terms of behavior, speech or thoughts. One should always be aware of everything done, spoken, and thought about, and make in-depth observations of the movements around (Silva n.d.). It means that one needs to realise that every action, speech, or thought is appropriate so that behavior, speech, and thoughts are proper.

Furthermore, Right Concentration is also a vital component in life because it includes obtaining a peaceful mind and having a qualified meditation teacher to guide how to meditate early. As a result, meditation can help promote human spiritual growth (Silva n.d.).

In short, The Noble Eightfold Path is the quintessential essence taught by the Buddha as a cure to free oneself from suffering and achieve happiness. It implies that followers must go through several processes to produce something better by taking care of three central elements: behavior, speech, and thought. These three ingredients are primary elements in determining followers’ efforts in liberating suffering and leading to wisdom. All these things existed after the death of Gautama Buddha (K. Sri Dhammananda 2002d). Although the Buddha has long passed away, the Buddhist message is still practiced today among them, but they understand Buddhists’ conclusion of The Noble Eightfold Path in the true sense of attaining wisdom and adhering to that principle in living a religious life as a Buddhist.

The discussion on the Noble Eightfold Path to complete the foundation of Buddhists’ belief in the teachings of the Buddha in manifesting the Right Action taught by the Buddha is to practice *Pancasila* (Five Precepts of Buddhism).

## Exploring the Buddhism Practice of Five Precepts (*Pancasila*)

In carrying out religious practices that are closely related to the Right Action to complement the basic features of the religious life of Buddhists, there are five fundamental things to be observed by the followers. As found in the 'Right Action', there are five things forbidden to all Buddhists. These acts are not to kill living beings, steal or take other people's property without permission, commit adultery (should not engage in sexual misconduct), lie or express abusive words that could hurt others, consume intoxicating drinks such as liquor or delusional substances such as heroin, marijuana, and opium (Dhammananda 1993a; Upa. Sasanasena Seng Hansen 2008).

It then demonstrates five elementary things taught by the Buddha to his followers to adhere to his teachings. Although everyone should follow the five basic principles in the teachings of Buddhism, there are differences in terms of practice. For the common Buddhists to adhere to five principles, *bhikkhu* monks usually have to adhere to 250 rules, and 348 for senior nuns, *bhikshu*, and hermits have to adhere to even stricter rules. This notable contrast depends on the status of the practitioner of Buddhist teachings. Stringent rules may put pressure on nuns. Due to its strict rules, it is not very easy to find nuns (Jones 1999). Thus, in Buddhist teachings, there are notable differences for followers in implementing Buddhist teachings depending on the practitioner's status, either following the five basic principles or choosing to practice Buddhist teachings, especially the *Bikkhu* (monks) and *Bikkhuni* (nuns). For *Bikkhuni*, this weight of practice is taxing because of the overly strict conditions that must be obeyed. Only certain countries have *Bikkhuni* because it depends on the willingness of women to become *Bikkhuni*.

### What is the Law of *Karma* (Sanskrit): *Kamma* (Pali)?

Etymologically, *Kamma* (Pali language) or *Karma* (Sanskrit language) means action or deed (Shamsul Kamarudin 2011). It is translated as the meritorious and demeritorious volition (Kusala Akusala Cetana) (Mahathera 1982). *Karma* is a natural law that applies following one's actions. *Karma* acts alone without external agents, free and powerful. It indicates an action for living beings that have strengths such as instinctual inclinations, consciousness, and others. It is this awareness that motivates a person either mentally or physically to act. The movement is regarded as a deed that will repeatedly occur for which the action will become a habit that will shape one's character. In Buddhism, this process is named *karma* (Dhammananda 1993b).

Buddhist Master in the *Nibbedhika Sutta; Anguttara Nikaya* explained the meaning of *Kamma*, which is the act of *cetana* (will). It exists because there is a human will that acts using the limbs, speech, or mind. Hence *karma* is all kinds of will (*cetana*), whether good, evil deeds done by the body (*kaya*), words (*vaci*) and mind (*mano*), the good (*kusala*) or the evil (*akusala*). In similar terms, '*Karma; Kamma*' is often referred to as the Law of *Kamma* is one of the laws of nature that work based on the principle of cause and effect (Holden 2013). It applies to depend on the will. Doing *Kamma* (deeds) becomes the cause of the existence of consequences or results. The consequence or result that exists from *Kamma* is referred to as *Kamma Vipaka* (Shamsul Kamarudin 2011). Understandably, the law of *karma* is interpreted as good and evil.



It applies the saying 'You reap what you sow'. *Karma*-based Buddhism is a belief in the principle of cause and effect (Mahathera 1982).

Accordingly, Mahathera (1982) stated that what the Buddha conveyed about '*karma*' is related to past and present deeds, which are one's responsibility to determine happiness and suffering compared to building one's future. In other words, it is the self that creates its *karma* (*kamma*). It does not depend on someone else or something else. Every living being has its *karma*, inheritance, cause, relatives, and refuge. The life of a creature differs from one life to another. It is independent of whether a human being is born of a royal family in one life or born of a low-income family in another life. *Karma* causes a person to suffer or feel happy. These differences in feelings depend on one's motivation. Actions driven by self-interest, greed or jealousy will cause suffering. At the same time, actions that arise from love for others or the desire to help others will produce happiness (Holden 2013).

It is indisputable that the Buddha viewed the mental, intellectual, moral and character differences manifested from one's actions and inclinations. In this regard, the Buddha believed that the doctrine of *karma* is not to pray for others to be saved but to be confident and self-reliant as it is the individual's responsibility always to strive, be enthusiastic, always do good, be tolerant, and be considerate. This genuine belief drives one to refrain from evil, do good, and be good without fear of punishment and being tempted to any reward. It is this doctrine of *karma* that solves all human problems and sufferings. *Karma* and rebirth are accepted as axiomatic (probability set axiomatic theory) (Mahathera 1982).

*Karma* is a natural rule that acts according to one's behavior without being influenced by external factors. *Karma* in the Buddhist context can be interpreted as 'You reap what you sow'. While in the aspect of science, *karma* is called the law that has cause and effect, and every cause has an impact. There is a comparable meaning, although the text is different. The resemblance is evident; the sown seeds that produce a harvest due to the act. It reflects a similar understanding between Buddhist theory and Science.

Nonetheless, *karma* is explained as the mind being the cause of all conditions, whether good or bad. For example, when one speaks and acts with wrong thoughts, then one will obtain the bad. If one speaks and acts with a sound mind, then one will obtain the good. In this case, *karma* symbolises an action driven by mental or physical movement. Based on this notion, there is a repetition of actions that become habitual to develop one's character. In its primary sense, *karma* means good or bad, mental action or desire. The Buddha said, 'Karma is a will'. Therefore, *karma* is not an entity, but a process, action, energy, force, and some interpretations interpret this force as 'action-influence'. It is the act of the self-responding to the self. The pain and happiness that a personal experience results from their actions, words, and thoughts towards themselves. Deeds, words and thoughts produce one's well-being and defeat, joy and misery (K. Sri Dhammananda 2002a).

Therefore, every act of *karma* symbolises an owner of either good or evil deeds. Precisely determined *karma* indicates that good and evil will be reflected in rebirth. As such, it shows that one's *karma* is one of the causes of the process of rebirth (Nyanatiloka 2015). Next, it is necessary to read about how rebirth can happen. Is it because of the existence of *karma* that one will be born again?

## How Does Rebirth Happen?

From the aspect of divinity in the concept of Buddhist teachings, it reflects their belief in God; They do not believe in God but believe in rebirth (life after death) (TYRAŁA 2018). The connotation of life after death is often used in Christianity. Nevertheless, in the context of Buddhism, 'belief in rebirth' is termed as 'rebirth'. Similar terminology is used in Hinduism.

The Buddhist tradition believes that rebirth will take place in another form and another existence, but the Buddha is within the realm of *samsāra*, and one will not be reborn, unlike the gods who will be reborn. Therefore, the Buddha denied that he would become a human or another being in the next life. It is because the rebirth of the Buddha has to do with his enlightenment (Roger William Farrington MA 2007). Dhammananda (2002a) asserted that life coexists with the mind. Damage occurs due to a lack of coordination of the mind and things related to life. It is also applicable to death, which shows the separation of the mind and the things connected with life. After the destruction of the body (physical in the form of matter), the mental force (mind) will rejoin a new combination in different material and re-exist in another life (rebirth).

However, this situation is different from what Roger William Farrington MA (2007) stated on the concept of rebirth, especially concerning the Buddha. How a Buddha as an ordinary human being is not reborn when scientifically the whole body will be destroyed and reunite in a new form (in various temperaments) depends on *karma*. Lam (2014) mentioned Willson's 1986 argument on rebirth in the context of Mahayana Buddhism. He described being a virtuous man (divine male), wise and accepting the inevitable destiny or reborn as a genuine religious practitioner. Peach & East (2018) asserted that women might not achieve (Buddhahood) fully and must wait for rebirth (born as a man) or change their femininity into men to qualify for Buddhahood. Lam (2014) disagreed with the statement (Peach & East 2018) that it can cause tension, as mentioned many in the *Mahāyāna* scriptures, which considers gender to be something conventional but necessary and still is the last resort to attain Buddhism.

On the other hand, rebirth occurs because a follower is not satisfied with what is offered. The Buddha regarded the doctrine of rebirth not as a mere theory but as a verifiable fact. Rebirth forms the foundations in Buddhism is acceptable. Things related to rebirth happen among Buddhists and other countries, religions, and free thinkers. The doctrine of rebirth in Buddhism differs from the teachings of transmigration and reincarnation in other religions (Dhammananda 2002c).

According to the Buddhist perspective, death is not the path to eternal life and destruction but rebirth, followed by regrowth, decay, and other deaths (Dhammananda 2002c). It symbolises that there will be a second death after rebirth. Thus, Dhammananda (2002c) explained that the cause of rebirth is because there is an unfulfilled desire. It implies that when all unsatisfactory desires are extinguished, then rebirth will cease.

Hence, if one wants to stop rebirth, ignorance must be destroyed. When ignorance is destroyed, every rebirth is meaningless, and most importantly, it needs to apply in life so that rebirth can be eradicated. It implies it is better not to be born again because one is uncertain what form one will be reborn. There is no pleasure after being born again because there is no verdict imposed, heaven or hell. The only detail described is that one will be born in various

forms (temperaments), which occurs when one does not reach *nirvana*. Nevertheless, it depends on the good or bad *karma* done during life.

## Conclusion

Ergo, religious life is indispensable in the context of Buddhism even without the presence of God and only emphasises the moral aspect in its teachings. The moral values highlighted are principles to be believed and practiced by Buddhists as a sign of their adherence to Buddhist teachings even though they know doctrines and analogies exist after the death of the Buddha. Nevertheless, the message left by the Buddha is still relevant among Buddhists despite the rejecting Buddhist teachings that consider them irrelevant by proposing other theories to be applied in Buddhist teachings.

Hence, the Buddha taught that his followers should not easily believe in something before investigating its truth by emphasising to build good relations with each other and rejecting negative things that dominate the mind. Similarly, the *karma* that will happen to a person is a direct consequence of cause and effect on what is done during life because *karma* decides whether a follower will be born again or not. Therefore, in religious life, one should follow the teachings of Buddhism and one's *karma* and rebirth as the basic principles of faith in Buddhism to further increase belief and adherence to the religion by adhering to the teachings holistically instead of adopting it partly as a religious practice.

## Reference

- Alasdair, R. G.-F. 2012. *Becoming Buddhist: A Grounded Theory of Religious Change and Identity Formation in Western Buddhism*. Liverpool Johns Moores University.
- Berger, P. L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Doubleday.
- Buddhist, P., Group, S., Buddhist, P., Group, S. & Suddhodana, K. (n.d.). *Buddhism Religious Basics*. <https://www.princeton.edu/~buddhism/>. <https://www.princeton.edu/~buddhism/>
- Cadge, W. 2017. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85(4): 1116–1117. doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfx076
- Chummi Ratanawaraha. 1986. *Dhammic Socialism by Bikkhu Buddhadasa*. (D. K. Swearer, Ed.). Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development.
- Dhammananda. 1993a. *Daily Buddhist Devotions*. Kuala Lumpur: Syarikat Percetakan & Perniagaan Acme.
- Dhammananda, K. S. 1993b. *What Buddhist Believe*. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.
- Durkheim, E. 1947. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by J. Swain. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Henning, D. H. 2002. *A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology*. A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology: Special Edition by the World Buddhist University.
- Herbrechtsmeier, W. 2006. *Buddhism and the Definition of Religion: One More Time*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. doi:10.2307/1386910

- Holden, C. G. 2013. Encyclopedia of human development. *Choice Reviews Online* 43(09): 43-5030-43–5030. doi:10.5860/choice.43-5030
- K. Sri Dhammananda. 1994. Treasure of the Dhamma. Buddhist Missionary Society.
- K. Sri Dhammananda. 1996. What is this Religion. *Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, hlm. 17–33. Publication of the Buddhist Missionary Society.
- K. Sri Dhammananda. 2002a. Is Buddhism Similar to Other Contemporary Teachings in India? Dlm. Edition (pnyt.). *What Buddhist Believe*. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia.
- K. Sri Dhammananda. 2002b. Buddhism Vis-a-vis Other Approaches. *What Buddhist Believe*, hlm. 4th Editio. Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur.
- K. Sri Dhammananda. 2002c. Buddhism: Essence and Comparative Approaches. *What Buddhist Believe*, hlm. 4th Edisi . Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia.
- K. Sri Dhammananda. 2002d. Life and Message of the Buddha. *What Buddhist Believe*, hlm. 4th Edisi . Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia.
- Lam, R. 2014. Legitimising legitimisation: Tārā's assimilation of masculine qualities in indo-tibetan buddhism and the feminist “reclaiming” of theological discourse. *Feminist Theology* 22(2): 157–172. doi:10.1177/0966735013507853
- Lama, D. 2010. Towards The True Kindship of Faiths How The World's Religions Can Come Together. London: Abacus.
- Lu, J. & Gao, Q. 2016. Faith and Happiness in China: Roles of Religious Identity, Beliefs, and Practice. *Social Indicators Research* 132(1): 273–290. doi:10.1007/s11205-016-1372-8
- Mahathera, N. 1982. Buddhism in a Nutshell. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Mair, J. 2013. Cultures of belief. *Anthropological Theory* 12(4): 448–466. doi:10.1177/1463499612469588
- Noss. Davids. & Grangaard, B. R. 1999. A History of the world's Religions. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Nyanatiloka. 2015. The Word of the Buddha. *Buddhist Publication Society*. doi:10.7312/columbia/9780231164962.003.0003
- Orrù, M., Wang, A. & Orrut, M. 2016. Durkheim, Religion and Buddhism. *Wiley on behalf of society for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31(1): 47–61.
- Peach, L. J. & East, P. 2018. Social Responsibility , Sex Change , and Salvation : Gender Justice in the Lotus Sutra. *Philosophy East and West* 52(1): 50–74.
- Peter D. Santana. 1984. Fundamentals of Buddhism. *Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.*
- Robert, A. J. 2002. The concept of belief in The Elementary Forms. *On Durkheim ' S Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, hlm. 39. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rogayah Estar Mohamad. 1999. *Ajaran dan kepercayaan agama Buddha: Satu kajian khusus terhadap masyarakat Siam di Kelantan*. Universiti Malaya.
- Roger William Farrington MA. 2007. *The Identity Problem in Buddhist Ethics An Examination of Buddhist and Parfitian Conceptions of the Subject*. University of London.
- Schneiders, S. M. 2015. Theological Definition of Religious Life. *Theology of Consecrated Life for the Contemporary World Week*(January 24, 2015): 15–32.

- Shamsul Kamarudin. 2011. Kepentingan Pendekatan Kepercayaan Dan Keyakinan Kepada Tuhan Melalui PTV. *Journal of Edupres* 1(September): 249–257.
- Silva, A. L. De. (n.d.). Why God Cannot Exist. *Beyond Belief*. Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc. Retrieved from [www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net)
- The World Factbook. 2018. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/my.html>
- TYRAŁA, R. 2018. Living without God in a religious country : Polish nonbelievers as a cultural minority. *Social Compass* 65((1)): 131–144. doi:10.1177/0037768617747497
- Upa. Sasanasena Seng Hansen. 2008. Ikhtisar Ajaran Buddha. Yogyakarta: Insight Vidyasena Production.