

BRIAN RUHE. *Freeing the Buddha. Diversity on a Sacred Path – Large Scale Concerns. A course on major aspects of Buddhism plus a dangerous collection of essays*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005, xxiv, 477 pp. ISBN 81-208-1835-0, HC, Rs. 595

Ruhe's book is an attempt to put all of himself and Buddhism in one basket. Of course, it would be better not to serve flies with cutlets, but the book is already written, so we have only one opportunity: to watch that basket.

The book starts with a foreword written by Teertha Mistlberger, Founder and Director of Shambhalla Training, West Vancouver, B.C. The foreword is written to introduce Ruhe to the reader, and we learn that he is a "mild-mannered fellow", "quintessential monk" and his book is "dangerous" ("Brian's writing is interesting and absorbing because it is *dangerous*", xii). It sounds promising. Let us see what this *dangerous* book is about.

In Preface, the author himself perfectly explains the sophisticated meaning of the title of his book and also describes his aims and tasks: "Freeing the Buddha does not mean Freeing *the Buddha Within* (that's been done before). It literally means freeing the Buddha from the false words that have been put in his mouth. The meaning is appropriate because the author is a Theravada Buddhist and a major theme in this book is about how the Mahayana Buddhists have distorted, diluted and deemphasized the Buddha's words" (p. xvi).

On the other hand, the author confesses to the reader that "the title of this book *Freeing the Buddha* was selected because studies indicate that a provocative title can increase book sales from 5% to 15%" (p. xvi).

What a marvelous marketing! Why not to think about how to rename existing books (Bible, or Buddha's *S* tras, for example) to increase sales? OK, but let us not get stuck to the market as long as the book has obviously spiritual goals: "This book raises awareness for the need to free the Buddha and his teachings from the cultural traditions that Buddhists have been piling all over him, and to free the Buddha from being associated with false sutras" (p. xvi).

Here he is at last, a person who is able to liberate the Buddha from the bad Mahayanists and their false sutras. The hero comes! Tremble, you, false gurus! Besides, the author doesn't restrict himself to Buddhism. He also rescues Jesus from Christians (see the essay "Rescuing Jesus from Christians", p. 299). And I hope in future he will excuse Mohammed from Muslims and will exempt Moses from Israelites (this is partly done on page 110).

And what about the other parts of the title? "The *Large Scale of Concern*" part of the subtitle was taken from a talk with the Dorje Loppön Lödro Dorje in which he

referred to the great compassionate view of the bodhisattvas” (p. xvi). As we can see, not all Mahayanists are bad guys. Dorje Loppön Lödro Dorje (Eric Holm) at least is a good one. Maybe there is a tiny chance for Mahayana.

“‘Diversity on a Sacred Path’ was chosen because these essays explore how Buddhism relates to the diverse picture of humanity in the world. Also, because of the diverse aspirations of sentient beings, there are diverse ways for people to enter onto the Buddhist path to enlightenment. The subtitle states ‘a dangerous collection of essays,’ because Oscar Wilde said, ‘An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all’” (p. xvi).

It is very kind of Mr. Ruhe to remind Oscar Wilde. Some other quotation from Wilde fits the occasion, but I do not cite this quotation right now not to strike an incongruous note into Ruhe’s writings and not to be a spoilsport. After the title of the book is completely deciphered, we can go forward to make the acquaintance with the book itself.

The book consists of two parts. The first part is called “A Course in Buddhism”. It is divided into ten classes because “these ten classes were designed based upon the view that most people don’t want to take more than ten classes on Buddhism or any other subject” (p. 13).

This remarkable note is probably based on Ruhe’s own experience, but let us take it as it is. And so, we have ten classes, or ten chapters, where fundamentals of Theravada Buddhism with some traces of Tibetan Buddhism are mixed thoroughly with anecdotes, pseudo-historical facts and just so stories in such a way that in the issue we have a kind of impassable pulp swamps. Brian Ruhe quotes Gampopa and Darth Vader from ‘Star Wars’, Edward Conze and Koran, James Joyce and Bernard Shaw. I cannot refrain myself from making several quotations. They need no comments, they speak for themselves. Just have a fun: “To a Buddhist who affirms his choice of going for refuge in the three gems of the Buddha, his teachings, and the community of fellow Buddhists, Buddhist cosmology explains the ground under one’s feet and the Hubble Space Telescope’s discoveries. The Hubble Space Telescope is an instrument that helps to support the Buddha’s teaching because it has the technology necessary to finally confirm what Siddhartha Gotama Buddha started teaching 2587 years ago in northeastern India” (p. 97).

“A Buddhist interpretation of Moses’ experience with the burning bush is that it very possibly happened exactly the way Moses said that it did. But the scariest thing about the entire Buddhist religion is that Buddhism does not refute the existence of Jehovah. Buddhism recognizes the existence of Jehovah as one great deva in the fine material sphere of existence” (p. 110). “Mental hospitals are filled with people who can genuinely catch devas, but they can’t contain devas. If you succeed at channelling, you may be in the big leagues at that point. Some highly successful business people channel this ability into their careers. Don’t lose it” (p. 154).

After big portions of citations from Sri Aurobindo on “Experiences of the Inner and Cosmic Consciousness” there comes a “Constitution of the Higher Realms Club” where it is stated that “the part of the Buddha’s teachings which inspire the Higher Realms Club are those that reveal the nature of devas, all of the heavens, and how to beneficially contact them. Our goal is to uplift ourselves and uplift others. The Higher Realms Club tries to foster a community feeling.

The Club fosters human/deva democracy and freedom. We have no secrets. Spiritual government is poison. Be refuge unto yourself. In appreciating the Protestant pioneers – Martin Luther, John Calvin and Erasmus, this Constitution warns that coerced devotion for people or higher realm beings may be the work of Mara”, etc. (pp. 171–72). In other words, welcome to the club.

For most inquisitive and advanced persons Brian Ruhe has included into his book a set of *dangerous* essays (as the second part of the book). What these essays are about? Mostly about a mishmash in his own head. From these essays we learn a lot of useful things, for example, that “the powers of the higher realms were invoked and harnessed by Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, which they unleashed in World War II” (p. 236); that “Nazi elite may have believed that they were recycling humanity through the process of rebirth” (p. 270); that UFOs are devas from the higher realms (see the essay “Buddhism and UFOs”, pp. 277–87), etc. In addition to all this nonsense, we learn that “Mara Made Mahayana” (p. 380) and that “Any Mahayana teacher who has studied Buddhist history must be a dishonest person if they uphold their tradition’s view of the origins of Mahayana Buddhism” (p. 352).

We might continue, but it seems to me that the reader is warned. The book is really very dangerous, as may be dangerous a really deadly sin. But let us not forget the words by Oscar Wilde, which are exactly to the point: “There is no sin except stupidity”.

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