## Sunday, May 22, 2005

### [Einstein on Buddhism](http://thebuddhistblog.blogspot.com/2005/05/einstein-on-buddhism.html)

Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future: It transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and spiritual; and it is based on a religious sense aspiring from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. -Albert Einstein  
  
If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism. -Albert Einstein  
  
A human being is part of the whole, called by us 'Universe'; a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest--a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely but striving for such achievement is, in itself, a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.  
-Albert Einstein  
  
Here's another quote from Einstein that I love. It is my signature at the bottom of my emails:  
  
The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed. -Albert Einstein

October 26, 2007

## [Einstein's Quotes on Buddhism](http://www.tricycle.com/p/176)

6.23 Confucius said, "When a cornered vessel no longer has any corners, should it be called a cornered vessel? Should it?" - *The Analects*, quoted in Wing-Tsit Chan's *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1963

The Confucian school, like many other schools of Chinese philosophy, had a theory about names and actuality, commonly called the "rectification of names." The Confucians held that the rectification of names was an ethical project, not merely a metaphysical or logical concern, because all things must be fit into their proper scheme in the universe. But you don't have to be a Confucian to want to set the record straight on Buddhism and the quotes about it attributed to various luminaries and used to promote (or defend?) the dharma.

To wit: There are two similar versions of a prominent Einstein quote on Buddhism floating around the web, reproducing themselves in viral fashion. They are:

Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future: It transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and the spiritual, and it is based on a religious sense aspiring from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity.

and:

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that could cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.

These quotes are rarely said to come from a particular book or speech, but we sometimes see this attribution:

*Albert Einstein, The Human Side*, edited by Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffman, Princeton University Press, 1954

Now, [this book](http://press.princeton.edu/titles/562.html) is subtitled *New Glimpses From His Archives* and is not *by* Einstein, so the quote may not actually be his, but someone quoting him or paraphrasing him, as pointed out on the E-Sangha discussion forums (see below for more on that). The two slightly different versions of the quote given above may lend support to that theory. But if so, this should be noted when the quotes are used. A [Google Books search](http://books.google.com/books?id=T5R7JsRRtoIC&pg=PP1&dq=the+human+side+albert+einstein&sig=Qg_dCa35rhewhu7PyAgNj0TWQoo) of *The Human Side* yields no hits for the word "Buddhism" but rather one and only one for "Buddha":

[Page 70](http://books.google.com/books?id=T5R7JsRRtoIC&pg=PA70&vq=buddha&dq=the+human+side+albert+einstein&sig=MBLmihU7cw4huqPCvxgLy4UQd2k)   
What humanity owes to personalities like Buddha, Moses, and Jesus ranks for me higher than all the achievements of the enquiring and constructive mind.

So these quotes seem to be spurious. (Some pages of the book are omitted from Google's preview, but the entire book seems to be searchable. As I haven't read the book myself I admit the possibility that these quotes may lurk elsewhere in the work -- if so, perhaps some intrepid searcher will at last unearth them.) There is much valuable discussion of this very issue on [WikiQuote](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Talk:Albert_Einstein#Einstein_and_Buddhism:_a_widely-cited_but_spurious_quotation), the discussion forums of the [Buddhist Society of Western Australia](http://www.bswa.org/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=2509&forum=9), and [E-Sangha](http://www.lioncity.net/buddhism/index.php?showtopic=49073). (You need to be registered to view the E-Sangha boards.) Also look at [Religious Tolerance](http://www.religioustolerance.org/buddhism.htm)'s comments on this issue.

If you Google these quotes, you'll find they're all over the place on sites devoted to Buddhism, Einstein, and science, from [The Buddhist Blog](http://thebuddhistblog.blogspot.com/2005/05/einstein-on-buddhism.html) to the [Progressive Buddhism](http://progressivebuddhism.blogspot.com/) blog (which recently had a long back-and-forth about a spurious Buddha quote [make that "possibly spurious" -- see comment below] used by Paul Carus, author of the popular [*Gospel of Buddha*](http://www.amazon.com/Gospel-Buddha-Paul-Carus/dp/1602065667/ref=pd_bbs_sr_2/104-2699423-9167155?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1193414493&sr=8-2).) A bogus Einsteinism also appeared in Tricycle promotional material several years back before the sagacious [Kenneth Kraft](http://cas.lehigh.edu/casweb/content/default.aspx?pageid=291) set the record straight.

Bogus quotes reproduced on the web are a problem that comes up quite often. I think one of the candidates in this current, already exhausting Presidential election cycle got caught in a trap like this, and the more we rely on the web and neglect primary sources (and actual books), the more this will happen, and it may give us something much more pernicious than this Einstein issue.

So these quotes, interesting and entertaining as they are, should be shelved, or at least have the Einstein attribution removed, until someone can tell us from whence they originally came.

*- Philip Ryan, Web Editor*