

Could I be a fundamentalist

even a terrorist?

The Buddha talks about views and opinions as a 'thicket, a wilderness, a contortion, a vacillation and a fetter'. In an early collection, the Nipata Sutta, he is for ever telling his followers not to get caught up in debates. If you win you suffer from the conceit that, therefore, you must be right. (Gandhi warns that truth can be in a minority of one!) And if you lose you feel humiliated - even though you may be right.

To take up this position of 'I'm right you're wrong', we need to have three components: ditthi, mano and tanha. Ditthi is the wrong view. However, even when a right view is held with mano and tanha, then it can still be dangerous.

Mano is conceit. The Buddha points us to three conceits: I am better than; I am worse than; and, at a more subtle level, I am equal to. The bigheadedness of 'I am better' is the most obvious. 'I am worse' often masquerades as false humility. Humility is being content with just the way we are. Why compare? Indeed 'all comparison is odious!' With 'I am equal to', we feel more comfortable, but then the group we join is either superior or inferior to another group. It is a collusive conceit. As a fundamentalist, of course, mine is THE truth - and I have the support of others who believe likewise.

Tanha is the attachment. Whereas ditthi and mano tend to be heady, it's the attachment that gives them stuffing. The heart clings to it. Here is the spring that torrents righteous anger.

So to be a good Buddhist fundamentalist, I will need to have a wrong view, (it could simply be that my view is exclusively right), the conceit that I or we are right and everyone who disagrees with me or us is wrong and the attachment that supports my position with 'righteous anger' and often 'cold hatred', righteously justified.

But there needs to be more, I think. Love! A constrained love, a exclusive love, no doubt. But none the less love. A love of one's religion which one can even interpret to support killing. A devotion to an ideal which would make the world a heaven if I make everyone everyone believe and follow. If I were to take the next step and do away with the enemy, I would also need a good dose of courage and believe in the reward- whether it be Nibbana or a heavenly rebirth.

But there is also a darker side. It would seem that fundamentalists fear annihilation. They experience the dominant culture of modernism with its commitment to cold rationality, 'pure science', disregard of past 'holy texts', libertarian morals and a selfish capitalism that supports hedonistic materialism as not only deeply offensive, but an overwhelming enemy. Buddhism is not immune from such tendencies. There have been many cases of fundamentalist thought and action. To mention only one. In the early years of independence in Sri Lanka a senior Buddhist monk, Talduwe Somarama Thero, thought with other conspirators that the government was undermining Buddhism and Buddhist culture. He shot the Prime Minister, Hon S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who later died of his wounds. Even today, in Sri Lanka, there are monks who have established a political party and won seats in Parliament on the platform nationalism and fundamentalism. And there are still dreadful things going on in Myanmar for similar reasons.

For myself, I have not found it difficult to catch some ingredients of fundamentalism within me. I need only catch my thoughts and attendant emotions when I hear, see or read something I disagree with or when I find myself in conversation with someone who holds opposing views.

The trick, perhaps, is to see one's views and opinions more as perspectives. By doing so, we may be able to accept even opposing views and come to a fuller picture and an easy compromise (a foul word to fundamentalists, whether religious or secular). For personal views and opinions are, by definition, never the full perspective. And this demands we let go

of conceit and attachment. No bad thing!

I dare say it may mean the end of adversarial politics and the antics of Parliament. Pity?!