

# Slavoj Žižek's Interpretation of 'Buddhism'

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## Introduction:

While never personally knowing Slavoj Žižek<sup>119</sup>, and admiring some of his work, many of my associates within Buddhist Studies have become disturbed or are confused over his philosophical representation of Buddhism, and what he feels are important ideas for Buddhists. Therefore, this article examines some of his interpretations, and where or how I can, represent or correct any erroneous presentation.<sup>120</sup> It was in a recent video that he said: “In order to understand..., you already have to be...”<sup>121</sup>, so it is the hope of this Buddhist studies scholar to make some sense of Professor Žižek’s lectures and publications pertaining strictly to

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<sup>118</sup> I’d like to thank Justin Whitaker for commenting on portions of this paper, useful for clarifying points in this paper. I couldn’t answer all of his questions, or should not answer all of the questions, because some responses would diverge away from the intention of my work.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=SP6G7XqzK94&NR=1> – This lecture by Žižek features an introduction which claims that he has recently converted to Buddhism.

<sup>120</sup> Where there is an interruption of Žižek, for some point of clarification, those words are italicized.

<sup>121</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm\\_dR-XMSY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm_dR-XMSY) – accessed on 5 December 2012

portions dealing with Buddhist material, because if an engagement was done into other aspects of his works, this would be a voluminous publication – and being a trained-Buddhist should allow me to do this. Containment, working only within Buddhist thematic ideas, was necessary and as a result full explanations may not be possible.

## Reviewing Žižek:

Buddhism, for Žižek, may be some sort of idealism. He is a renown atheist, and hesitates into total emersion into some tradition, of course rooted in years of critical investigations.<sup>122</sup> However: Prof. Žižek seems to have held a long-standing interest in Buddhism<sup>123</sup>, which exceeds the span of my life, which should have enabled him to possess a deep comprehension of Buddhist doctrine at some profound level, void of any generalizations. In his book, *Less Than Nothing*, he stated: “Back in the hippie era of the 1960s, I remember reading a book by Alan Watts, the zen popularizer, in which he explained how, in the simple activity of love-making [*not something advocated in Theravada Buddhism, since this system was designed for world-renunciates and interested adherents remaining in the household life*], the whole cosmos resonates [*certainly this is false, as there is nothing on the moons of Jupiter or anything resident within the Kuiper Belt that cares about two animals fornicating on Earth- despite the romantic language of the poet issuing the phrase*], the two opposing cosmic [*human mind-constructed, earthly-devised*] principles, yin and yang, dancing [*and we bet, romantically?*] with each other – a message which no doubt boosted the confidence [*an unreal, false-condition*] of adolescents [*clearly delusional under the influence of raging hormones*] wanting sex [*clearly something over-rated and for those that actively participate in the endeavor it may become some mechanical operation, such as consensual masturbation, just using the body of the other person to get*

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<sup>122</sup> See for instance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=SP6G7XqzK94&NR=1>

<sup>123</sup> It seems from the massive body of works produced by him that he has a wide knowledge-base, for instance: <http://somethingcompletelydifferent.wordpress.com/2007/11/19/Žižeks-western-buddhism-redux/> - This website article determines that Buddhism and the movie franchise of Star Wars offer ideas that can replace Christianity, and herein, he also notes how Western Buddhism, through its Zen lineage, may still be linked to fascist elements – elements which are later discussed in his lecture found on Youtube about Buddhism and Global Capitalism.

*the orgasm that is being sought between partners, as also some hypersexualized people could perhaps attest to – people learn to just please themselves, despite any intention to please the other, the ‘self’ is still the concern]* as well as spiritual fulfillment.”<sup>124</sup> It’s widely known that presentations of Buddhism from such instructors [Žižek lists the antagonists as D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts] provide for an inadequate doctrinal comprehension – which incidentally serve as the basis for the general American’s comprehension or misunderstanding of Buddhism.<sup>125</sup> Yin and Yang are not even genuine Buddhist principles, but are Chinese philosophical concepts. Then, as throughout many of his publications, Žižek maintains his often-published theme: sexuality – something that really doesn’t belong in a discussion about Buddhism [*but to be fair, the professor is a psychoanalyst and not a scholar of Buddhism*], since exhibiting any form of sexuality is generally prohibited. In the context of Soviet Russia, Žižek writes: “...sexuality is inherently patho-logical, it contaminates cold, balanced logic with a particular pathos – sexual arousal is the disturbance associated with bourgeois corruption... numerous psycho-physiological ‘materialist’ researchers trying to demonstrate that sexual arousal is a pathological state. Such antifeminist outbursts are much closer to the truth than the aseptic tolerance of sexuality.”

In his 2001 publication, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?*, Professor Žižek suggests Buddhism may be operating on some antiquated principles. Although elsewhere, he said: “...religion is no longer fully integrated into and identified with a particular cultural life-form, but acquires autonomy, so that it can survive as the same religion in different cultures... [*and therefore can serve only*] two possible roles: therapeutic or critical.”<sup>126</sup> [Recall the traditional Marxian perspective: religions serve only to satiate a population suffering or alienated from the conditions brought upon it by the oppressive governing-forces, regardless of it being the place of employment or the government.] Returning to *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?*, this is less of an insult, but more

<sup>124</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 739

<sup>125</sup> This is not just some idea created, but something that is gained from listening to his speeches available on Youtube and the biographical-data found here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan\\_Watts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Watts) - yet, he remains popular to general audiences.

<sup>126</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 3

of an obvious or critical observation for the sake of clearer comprehension or steps towards the genuine truth. Attachment to some aspect of the Dhamma or even being an active meditator may serve as a therapeutic device [*escapism*] and Buddhist scholars are known to use what is taught to gain critical insights while inquiring into the deep nature of the scenario.

He states: “...Buddhism assert(s) the individual’s ability to establish direct contact with the Absolute [*but there is no Absolute, in terms of some creation-deity, rather the highest-absolute concept for Buddhism is the principle of Nibbana*], bypassing [although in another text he prefers to state that we must: “...maintain a proper distance – if we get too close to it, we get burned by the sun... Our attitude towards the Void is thus thoroughly ambivalent, marked by simultaneous attraction and repulsion.”<sup>127</sup>] the hierarchical structure [although we cannot be sure of what form of structure that Žižek is referring to] of cosmos [certainly something that humans have little interaction with, despite our efforts with satellites and space-craft, Moon and Mars landings, as so forth] and society [which is a principle formed by civilizations which is indeed structures, and Buddhism does actually bypass this structure through the renunciation principle], Buddhism remains indebted to the pagan [perhaps nothing but Brahmanism, but of course pagan here would be some non-Christian society, but it is actually a term from the Roman empire to define the people living out in the rural-countryside who have not aligned themselves to the militant<sup>128</sup> urbanized-ideology. The term now has some negative connotation.] notion of the great Chain of Being [there is no “Being” in terms a living/celestial-being, but rather the term emphasizes a condition of becoming, the aspiration towards some transformation into existence]... we cannot escape the consequence of our past acts [some, perhaps, but of course this pertains to some measurable amount of guilt, as some residual element in the consciousness of some individual]; they [unwholesome past actions] trail behind us like shadows, and sooner or later they catch up with us: we have to pay the price [*retribution for the relevant volitional-kamma that one engaged with*]. That is the kernel of

<sup>127</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 79

<sup>128</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paganism> - accessed on 28 November 2012

the properly pagan tragic vision of life [*he couldn't be accounting for every society and their varying beliefs that did not embrace Rome's version of Christianity*]: our very existence [*as composed of body and mind – body in the sense of elements and form; and mind in the sense of feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness*] is ultimately the proof of our sin [*existence or being born cannot equate to some sin*], something we should feel guilty about [*It would be absurd to feel guilt about being born. Who casted this condition upon humanity?*], something [*an unexplainable event, and perhaps here Žižek would be taking up that event-idea from Alain Badiou?*] that disturbs the cosmic [*conventional-Earthly*] balance [*when referencing astronomical details, we can determine the actual insignificance of human-beings*]; and we pay the price for it in our ultimate annihilation [*this can only be our death as individuals or our eradication as a species*]. ...this pagan notion involves [*in some form of coded language*] the short circuit [*abnormal connection of particle currents*], the overlap between the 'ontological' [*the study of something fundamental and whether or not that something can 'be' or 'become'*] and 'ethical' [*some moral philosophy that tries to determine wrong or correct/right behaviors or actions*] dimensions' ...”<sup>129</sup> Žižek, in his *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, unpacks his coded language: “A short circuit appears when there is a fault connection in the network – faulty, of course, from the standpoint of the network's smooth functioning. Is not the shock of short-circuiting, therefore, one of the best metaphors for a critical reading? ...take a major classic (text, author, notion), and read it in a short-circuiting way, through the lens of a ‘minor’ author, text, or conceptual apparatus (minor, not in the sense of lesser-quality, but marginalized, disavowed by the hegemonic ideology, or dealing with a ‘lower’, less dignified topic). If the minor reference is well-chosen, such a procedure can lead to insights which completely shatter and undermine our common perceptions. This is what Marx, among others, did with philosophy and religion (short-circuiting philosophical speculation through the lens of political economy, that is to say, economic speculation).”<sup>130</sup> Žižek is trying to short-circuit

<sup>129</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 53

<sup>130</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), no page number – the first page of the Series Forward & the Series Forward is echoed again in Slavoj Žižek: *The Parallax*

Buddhism. However there is some functionalistic purpose of this behavior: "...to revive a practice of reading which confronts a classic text, author, or notion with its own hidden presuppositions, and thus reveals its disavowed truth... to make him or her aware of another – disturbing – side of something he or she knew all the time."<sup>131</sup>

What more can I say on the issue? It may be useful and true to some extent that the ontological issue within Buddhism mandates the sense of an absence or voiding of self, which in response cultivates greater abilities to engage in what can be determined to be presented as a harmonious society in terms of the recognition of greater ethical and moral principles: the Buddhist Sangha can be a relative-example of this. By pushing aside the self-construct, people are better able to see the external challenges and develop better perspectives for managing these stressful situations. When a person works with the idea of "self", this deviates from the greater social concern: improving society, or being engaged with developing society in some harmonious manner.

A Theravada Buddhist cannot be so certain nor expect to establish contact with the absolute idea, how can anything be absolute when everything is subjected to impermanence? By 'establishing' someone might assume 'becoming'; by 'contact' someone might assume 'participation with sensuality'; and by the term 'absolute' someone might determine this to mean something akin to supreme-heavenly ideas – but what is closer to the reality that a Theravada Buddhist might face? The impending reality is that when our lives reach the point of termination – realistically: our bodies begin the process of decay, if left to natural processes, and the only conceivable way in which we could possibly interact with the cosmos would be if our star burst and we were reduced to cosmic ash and resultantly spread throughout the galaxy. However, some cultures have various means with handling a dead-person, and therefore not all bodies, embalmed or cremated, pass through all proper stages of natural decay. In Theravada Buddhism, we place dead bodies into the furnace, reducing the body to ash, and the relics

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View (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. ix

<sup>131</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), no page number – the second page of the Series Forward

may be collected by the family when the process is complete. Heavenly ideas for Buddhists are just pleasant mental-realms. If there is “something”, these mental realms may be all that we have. Ashes into ashes, dust into dust – the cycle appears to be complete.

Prof. Žižek assumes that there is a hierarchical structure of the cosmos or society that would be bypassed, by the Buddhist. However: what if the term was not ‘bypassing’, rather closer to the truth is that someone is participating with the mundane or supramundane differently than what is expected from the common person. What if, because we are really human-animals, we are really not bypassing anything in this era of government regulation and the impossibility of living truly free lives – there is nothing to bypass or escape in our bounded condition. [*What truly placed us in this condition of servitude – something perhaps invalid if assumed that it is conditioned by our earthly-conventional birth?*] True, renunciation allows for the illusion of escape [*we may equally assert that we are under the illusion that we are in the condition of bondage*], but even then there is the condition of belonging into some association, however loose one group may be – there is still some sense of control and submission/restraint. It could be ‘bypassing’ in the sense that one is not dealing with the ‘established’ structure, but this is an established structure by those people who deal with a cosmological structure that assumes that there could be a supreme deity – and it is a fact that not all societies hold this position or ideal and to assume that the structure is universal, in the conventional sense of operating over the entire world, is ridiculous - in the sense that this isn’t even seen when someone is examining anything in astronomy. Prof. Žižek has even spoken of quantum-physics in many of his publications and appears to be well-read in the genre – so we can ascertain that he is speaking merely about the basic principles of these issues – rather he is speaking to some audience and for some purpose, and offers only specialized material for the sake of that dialogue. This appears to also serve as a watering down of the genre, and may even push aside material, as a swipe of disrespect in the eyes of specialists.

Žižek asserts that Buddhists remain indebted to some Great Chain of Being [*again, the self, as the only conceptualized-being is construed as having mere cellular and conditional form, and our*

*determination is that we also call upon feelings, mental/volitional formations, perceptions and consciousness – and it may only be this that is structured as godlike] – and issues that this is a pagan [again, uncareful terminology] notion – but if he is speaking in terms of pagan [this is the arrogance of the assumption that they are all under-educated heathens], he again is asserting that the universal structure is Christian [but a correction must be assumed to proclaim is as: Abrahamic, Brahman-Hinduistic, or Zoroastrianistic - and this is structurally-irrelevant to Buddhism, or from the processes from within which it evolved from: the context being the established Hindu-Brahman tradition. There was a huge split in the ancient tradition, when the Asuras and the Devas clashed. There were those who sided with the Asuras over the Devas; and there were those that sided with the Devas over the Asuras. The side that chose the Asuras – and their collection of ideas, became the Zoroastrians; and those who chose the Devas in the great battle were the precursors to the Brahmanistic tradition that eventually gave rise to the Buddhist system that still proclaims that devas are good celestial beings and asuras are demonic].*

If the idea is taken that Buddhism did grow and develop in the urban atmosphere around the Ganges River and other adjacent cities, then the ideas of Buddhism could hardly be considered pagan – pagan is again a term removed from the existing cultural context that Buddhism was developed within and grew out of – for instance into Southeast Asia. Buddhists live and operating in their daily lives never concerned with some celestial-imaginary being [*Everyone should forgive those that still pay some homage to the shrines of the major Hindu deities – but there are those Buddhists who adhere to a purely-Buddhist doctrine void of superstitions. They don't make for interesting interviews.*]; and if Žižek was contained or content in the atheistic ideology that is professed in his speeches or works – he could be satiated, well enough, to know that through focusing on the development of individuals and society, then indeed both aspects of the lower forms of structure could indeed fulfill many of the aims illustrated in a Marxist discourse, from some micro-to-macro level of transformative possibilities.

Certainly within this Buddhist context: the issue of kamma is established, since he is asserting that our past deeds will tragically [*maybe only in the sense that certain things are unavoidable while living*] haunt us, as proof of some sin that we must feel guilty about. [*Many people are beginning to disregard this idea of kamma, as it is seen as some device created to prevent someone from attaining Nibbana in the present life – the present life in the sense that the Dhamma is for the wise to see here and now – not in a future rebirth.*] However, what if there is no stain of guilt? Someone may say that talking about the issue [*the sin*] is a demonstration of guilt, but for example: someone may not feel guilty for squashing cockroaches, and the idea of squashing a cockroach inside someone's house can be rationalized as some deed of purification – or something done well. [*Anyone can see elsewhere, the resurrection of S.T. Suzuki's story of the fault being upon the enemy-victim for running into the soldier's plunging sword*] There are differing perspectives on the issue of guilt; but I haven't read anything that suggests Žižek is trying to measure or qualify any sort of guilt.

Žižek continues: “Against this pagan horizon... [*Christianity suspends*] the burden of the past, to cut the ropes which tie us to our past deeds, to wipe the slate and begin again from zero [*when such a person decides to take the dead- 'Jesus' as his personal redeeming savior?*]. There is no supernatural magic involved here: this liberation simply means the separation between the ‘ontological’ and the ‘ethical’ dimensions: the Great Chain of Being can be broken on the ethical level; sins can not only be pardoned, but also retroactively erased with no traces left [*this also occurs when someone converts to Islam, and it must be stated that Buddhism cannot or does not, ‘unfortunately’ afford for this possibility. A Buddhist is personally, morally/ethically-responsible to work out one’s own future for the conventional-self. There is no salvation or hope by some redeemer or circumvention – the Buddhist (and everyone in our ‘reality’) must shoulder the burdens of the volitions, and only from making amends and from true forgiveness will satiation be plausible, but only conventionally amongst others. In the end we inevitably return to the ‘cosmos’ as chemicals/elementary-particles.*].”

a New Beginning is possible.”<sup>132</sup> So, what Žižek is saying, is that if someone has concerns of a self, and if there is any ethical concerns with a self and the eradication of stored unwholesome aspects of consciousness, or rather than using those inadequate words: guilt – guilt for having engaged into some unwholesome activity – someone or something emerged to take the burden off of the sinning-offender, however ridiculous that this appears. We could grant Žižek a small victory here, as even the Arahant Angulimala was forced to endure his brutal-death, at the hands of a gang poised on revenging the previous deaths performed by Angulimala – there was no redemption for him, even after becoming a world-renouncing Bhikkhu. The transition could be seen: the favored student of a Shiva-cult<sup>133</sup> becomes tasked with completing a final duty, sent out and becomes a murderer, then is engaged in some conscious battle in which he faces a defeat, then becomes a monk; and while being in the condition of a bhikkhu, he trains towards and attains arahantship – but still must face retribution from his previous crimes, while never harming anything while in that later-purified stage of his life. Buddhism demonstrates the realism of our lives, and is not caught up in an idealized fantasy.

In Žižek’s *Revolution at the Gates*, he spends a limited amount of time discussing a theory of reflection where only a consciousness observing the universe from the outside could see the universal-truth. This absolute [*God-like?*] perspective is inherent with the existence of things [*within the minds or processes of all beings?*]. There is no true objective reality, since what we know is just an imaginative distortion.<sup>134</sup> So there is only subjectivity [*that our mental activity is the only ‘proof’ that we have some sort of existence*].<sup>135</sup> Buddhism sees an ideology which determines that people and all things are ever-changing or impermanent; subjected to conditions of suffering; and that nothing we can determine will ultimately become something that is determined to be of some conceptualized momentarily existing subjective/conventional-self.

<sup>132</sup> Slavoj Žižek: Did Someone Say Totalitarianism? (London: Verso, 2001), p. 53

<sup>133</sup> See: Richard F. Gombrich: How Buddhism Begun – The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2002) – Who is Āṅgulimāla?, pp. 135-164

<sup>134</sup> Slavoj Žižek: Revolution at the Gates (London: Verso, 2002), p. 181

<sup>135</sup> Slavoj Žižek: Revolution at the Gates (London: Verso, 2002), p. 315

Žižek states: “...paganism [although we are not sure of what sort Žižek is discussing, and Buddhism hopefully is not included within that monolithic-other, distinct from the Romanized traditions]... legitimizes social hierarchy... by reference to a notion [such a generalized term without some reference] of the universe [or rather civilization] in which all differences [perhaps he wishes to assert class, sex, race, or other labels created to distinguish amongst fellow humans] are ultimately rendered worthless [which is indeed a proper testament to these false-distinctions], in which every determinate being ultimately disintegrates [owing to the law of impermanence] into the primordial [existing from the original creation] Abyss [perhaps he is trying to say ‘nothing’, but the abyss for Žižek may be his determination that in Abrahamic traditions such as Christianity, the universe is broken into little pieces: “this is the intellectual abyss between Buddhism and Christianity; what for the Buddhist or Theosophists personality is the fall of man, for the Christian is the purpose of God, the whole point of his cosmic idea...”]<sup>136</sup> Restated: humans are doomed because they have individualized character, but this is taken as the idealized nature for the newer tradition?] out of which it emerged. [The abyss of Brahmanism, the fractioning of the castes, the multitude of many deities – the complexities or confusion of what is what... Buddhism emerged from this stew of ideas.]

Žižek does not mention: Buddhism came from or developed around Bodhigaya, around Benares, India. This was no backwoods-of-Nepal, primitive-ideology that was being espoused by the ‘Fully Enlightened One’. Serious sociological studies assert what Žižek cannot state: “The arguments relating the rise of Buddhism to urbanization and state formation can be classified under four headings, according as they bear upon the relevance of Buddhism: (1) to the value of merchants, (2) to the nature of city life, (3) to political organization in the urban-based centralized state, (4) to the shift from pastoral to agrarian culture which economically underpinned the rise of cities.”<sup>137</sup> If anything these real studies

<sup>136</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 14 – but here, he is citing the work of Chesterton.

<sup>137</sup> Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett: The Sociology of Early Buddhism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 15-16 – this chapter deals with asceticism versus the urban life.

illuminate the transitioning confusion from the Axial Age (the era when the great-prophets/teachers of the modern-day's religions were beginning their dispensations) and we have the relics of those ideas preserved in our literature.

Žižek continues: ...according to Buddhism, we can achieve liberation from our past deeds [*Do we ignore the story of Āngulimāla? Does this deny what he mentioned previously in Revolution at the Gates? There, he asserts our past deeds tragically haunt us.*], but this liberation is possible only through radical renunciation of what we perceive as reality [*later he suggests that reality is a play of appearances*<sup>138</sup> - but the corrected assertion is that through comprehending that the Dhamma is for the here-and-now practitioner, this is the radicalization necessary for such a transformation to occur, and now Žižek will continue to tell us how: ], through liberating ourselves from the very impetus/thriving desire [*a mind-state*] that defines life [*repercussion: mind defines life?*] through extinguishing its spark and immersing ourselves in the primordial Void of Nirvana, in the formless One-All. [Žižek, himself, knows: "Is not this ritual an 'empirical' proof that the Buddhist experience of the peace of nirvana is not the ultimate fact, that something has to be excluded in order for us to attain this peace, namely, the Other's gaze?"<sup>139</sup> Of course, Žižek here is discussing the differences between Buddha statues and Christian saint-statues. The differences are: in Buddhist statues, the gaze is benevolently peaceful and letting things just be as they are; whereas for saints the gaze is aggressive-paranoiac and always on the lookout for some threat.<sup>140</sup> Žižek also affirms that it takes less energy to persist in something, and it takes more energy to dwell in nothing, so on principles of physics, there must be some distance.<sup>141</sup> So, his position must have changed since writing: "The real Evil is the supposedly innocent gaze which perceives in the world nothing

<sup>138</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 957

<sup>139</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), pp. 20-21

<sup>140</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 20

<sup>141</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 93

*but Evil... the real Evil is, of course, the gaze of the storyteller.<sup>142</sup> He can see the compassionate gaze of equanimity from the Buddha, and now recognizes the wickedness within the eyes of Christian Saints – so what are the phenom-types comprehending: some are looking at the good in others, while the antagonist is fault-finding and damning others. This may be the fundamental nature of these people.]*

There is no liberation in [conventional] life, since in this life and there is no other, we are always enslaved [Didn't he just mention that we can liberate ourselves, but now says we are always enslaved? Though it is hard to believe that somehow we entered into bondage or submitted to some master, but even a Buddhist 'renunciate' must answer to higher authorizes in the Sangha, so even within Buddhism there is not total freedom. The solution is to move from the conventional to unconventional, or in another words: from the mundane to the supramundane] to the craving that defines it: what we are now... is determined by our acts in our previous lives [if the submission to the concept of kamma is taken up by the consciousness; but if we change our present actions, say towards the wholesome, and cultivate wholesome actions or wholesome aspects of consciousness, then through this new-found ethical-conversion perhaps we can expect positive-attainments as an affirmation of the unconventional-system], and after our death [our bodies decay into the natural elements or phases of liquid, elemental-solids and air/gases], the consequences of our present life [which no longer engages in wholesome or unwholesome actions - terminates the functionality of our bodies] will determine the character [not exactly sure since our life-processes terminate, and there could be no determination after electrical-energies cease, rather this could be some objective/subjective reasoning or rational. An assessment can be made into the mindstate of the recently deceased at the moment just-prior to the death of that person: a positive mind expects positive results, the negative mind expects negative results] of our next reincarnation [only if you believe this concept of kamma, which cannot be tested, and as a charge – may only be an act of ignorant-faith in which Buddhists believe and celebrate]. In contrast to Buddhism, Christianity puts its wager

<sup>142</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso Books, 1989), p. 23

on the possibility of the radical Rupture [*philosophical/ideological*], of breaking the Great Chain of Being [*surely, he cannot be discussing either samsara or dependent origination so vaguely or indiscriminately as a merged conceptual process?*], already in this life, while we are still fully alive.”<sup>143</sup> Elsewhere, we can see a transformation in his thought, when he asserts: “Nirvana as the return to a pre-organic peace [*is he talking about the elementary-nature of our bodies?*] is a ‘false’ vacuum [*It cannot be said that there is nothing in a vacuum, if particles are moving in some direction due to some ‘pull’ – what is pulling the object away? See elsewhere, my comment on leaving a room and feeling the pressure move across someone’s face, as if entering into the Void/ Nibbana – there would seemingly have to be some transfer/movement of energy to maintain a sort of balance, or there would be some instability: such as when that peace-in-Nibbana has now gained another into its conceptual-realm*], since it ‘costs more’ in terms of energy expenditure [*catching/finding food, consuming the nutriment, performing actions, burning calories – living life*] than the circular movement [*mentality*] of the drive.”<sup>144</sup> It appears that the effectiveness of Buddhism is in its arresting of the mind to perform wholesome rather than unwholesome deeds. However, it is Žižek, who includes: “...the self kills not, and the self is not killed, therefore, you ought not to grieve for any burned Jew... do what you were ordered to do... This means that Buddhist encompassing Compassion has to be opposed to Christian intolerant, violent love.”<sup>145</sup>

Žižek spends many pages in *Less Than Nothing*, discussing aspects of Buddhism. In the book, Žižek asked an important question: “How did the fall into samsara, the Wheel of Life, occur?”<sup>146</sup> This is a very upsetting question for many Buddhists. Imagine your teacher drawing a circle on the front-board, and labeling it: ‘Samsara’, and then outside of it, drawing an arrow pointing into the circle; and then drawing a small circle near the tail of the arrow with the word:

<sup>143</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 54

<sup>144</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 945

<sup>145</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), pp. 32-33

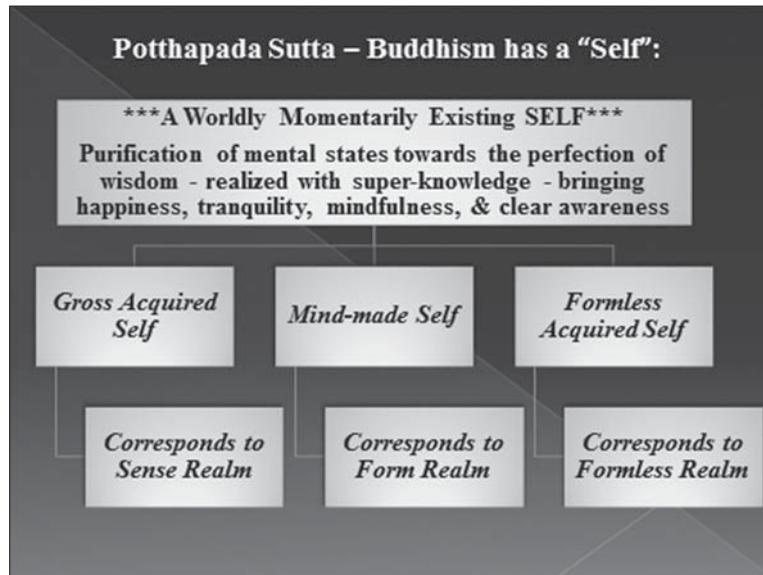
<sup>146</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 131

‘Us’. Who directed us into the cycle-of-suffering? It can’t be on the condition of some mythical-discourse (Aggañña Sutta), or by saying because we are born, age, suffer and die – that those conditions force us into some hellish-existence. Do we just agree and make daily life into misery? It could challenge what we think and know. Buddhism could parrot or replay that it is through our birth, from our mothers, that we fall into this cycle of suffering – while then, during the youngest years, the suffering is perhaps physical; when we begin to comprehend our minds later at later stages in our lives, we can learn that some of our problems are mental issues. We later become sick – enduring aspects of suffering; experience the changes occurring with aging; we get sicker and succumb to some illness perhaps, before death; and with death: our biological processes initially terminate. There may be some resultant growth of the fingernails and hair for a few days until total cell functions cease – but then bio-decay sets in, and we reintroduce our bodies and bacteria into the biosphere. We all know that we need to escape the round of suffering, but few of us know how. We can make our life much more than the misery we are told that is upon us.

He also asserts that Buddhist ontology is erroneous, since, if someone eliminates the illusion of a self, then that person can join the Void, a Void of Being that no one can adequately convey [*perhaps because it is not a physical location but is best described as a mental-realm or a state of mind – some heavenly-perception, except for that there is only nothingness as a void would be, but since you have attained towards it, you are now with Void – the Void has now been disturbed*]; and he stretches when he ponders if anyone can imagine a Buddhist claiming that the Void itself needs humans as the site [*yet there is no such location*] of its arrival.<sup>147</sup> The void might be best left alone, far from the taints of human-misconceptions. Could it be better to scrutinize one’s mind (where just about anything is possible) and body functions (within limits), rather than assume there is some existing-self?

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<sup>147</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 108



148

As demonstrated in the illustration above, there is a self that is discussed in Buddhism (*Digha Nikaya*), however, many people choose to only take the ideologically important non-self, and fail to discuss this conventional self, which resurrects its importance when discussing Buddhism functional for here-and-now principles. Buddhism does discuss ‘self’, and there are three forms, but they are conventional or worldly demonstrations, which assume a character temporarily. Buddhism should no longer discuss ontological matters and should now assume discussion towards conventions and praxis - social transformations which become new radical discourse for Buddhists.

It often appears that the Westerner’s attraction to Buddhism is from one of their many philosophical perspectives, and perhaps they have never asked the right questions while they were briefly researching Buddhism of whatever shade suiting their purpose. Žižek wishes to compare Christianity to Buddhism [*as he does in other books, and it is good that he brings such material to the reading-masses who might otherwise miss out from reading*

<sup>148</sup> My slide was taken from my lecture, created for the presentation of my paper, found inside this document: <http://www.icundv.com/vesak2011/book/symposium2010.pdf> - my paper for the 2010 United Nations Day of Vesak Conference, was entitled: “The Role We Play As Buddhist Educators for Global Recovery, pp. 124-150

*something about Buddhism]*, rather, in this instance he chooses to discuss the major Buddhist sectarian-triads – in the case of Buddhism [*and he is not trying to discuss the authenticity of any tradition, since that topic is better left for the specialist*], here he discusses concepts:

- ◆ **Theravada:** as elitist and demanding, since it tries to adhere to the strict interpretations of the practico-ethical doctrines or attitudes, while also focusing on the eradication of the illusory-self, before helping others get out of suffering [*regressing into egoism, to erase the constraints of self,*] towards the striving of nibbana. He is saying that the concept of an arahant is egotistical, but this venture assists in eradicating perspectives of such a self.
- ◆ **Mahayana:** is a more inconsistent regressive system of ideas, yet is compassionate towards others and focuses on the Bodhisattva concept – or assisting with the elimination of the suffering within others – which seems to be a cognitive paradox with the concept of a self, and betrays the original intention of Buddhism, through the ignorance of the follower, and is only realized upon Enlightenment, and misunderstands the principle of nirvana.
- ◆ **Vajrayana:** [*has proto-Fascist tendencies*<sup>149</sup>], as clearly regressive, involving the implementation of traditional ritualistic and dark/demonic magical forces or superstitious concepts. While much of this extraneous phenomena is not sanctioned, he claims they have pragmatic orientation, which do seem to help people along their ‘path’. The rituals are indifferent to any form of self-determination, totally against the original idea of what the Buddha prescribed, which can disturb the balance of nirvana). If the Bodhisattva attains enlightenment, and thus nirvana, why or how can this being return out of compassion (again, an emphasis on a self).

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<sup>149</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Parallax View (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 97

Entering nirvana/nibbana is not a higher meta-physical reality – but why is there a return to the mundane world? *[The cessation of defiling or unwholesome thoughts is well within every sane individual.]* Here is an extremely important quotation: “There is thus no need for Mahayana... *[Theravada]* is itself large enough to allow the enlightened one to help others achieve Enlightenment.” He continues to assert that the bodhisattva concept must have arose out of some sense of confusion over the idea of nirvana/nibbana – thereby, eventually overturning the original agnostic materialism. Žižek tries to summarize Vajrayana though some questions, pondering perhaps that truth does not alleviate our suffering and could indeed hurt. Peace may only be attainable by immersion into delusion *[Are we delusional when we pick up the ideology of Buddhism and train ourselves to emulate the attainments we find in the texts?]*. When Žižek states that people do things in the long run because they believe that the strategy will bring them happiness and pleasure, I cannot help but think that everyone following the system is being mentally-deceived or being voluntarily brain-washed – and this is not necessarily bad, but can yield very positive results. He leaves this section with an interesting line: “this negativity is not a problem but a solution, it is already in itself divine.”<sup>150</sup> Buddhism allows us to escape the fantasies inflicted upon us by social-life<sup>151</sup> - and escaping these illusions rooted in fetishized self-ishness. Buddhists don’t seek to discover some “true” self, but accept that there is only an imposter-self, and move onward to more socially beneficial endeavors.

Rather than quoting material for an extensive amount of time, the following is a paraphrase of what Žižek is saying on the next few pages<sup>152</sup>: He thinks that that there is a great benefit in the linking of cognitive-sciences or approaches to the mind with Buddhist thought – and the idea is not to actualize philosophy but to rediscover ancient wisdom. Yet this ancient wisdom has been here, but people are still only beginning to come to learn of it, which is not a fault of the ancient-teachings, but is due to biases in the structure

<sup>150</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), pp. 108-110

<sup>151</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso 2012), p. 129

<sup>152</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 205-208

or educational-schematics of non-Buddhist cultures. Buddhist-ideas are not brought out into common discourses within other cultures. I cannot research into why these cultures have avoided learning Buddhism, but it is almost laughable when someone is asserting something from their studies, when the Buddha and his later disciplines have been proclaiming the same thing for centuries, and these educated-people are only now discussing it through science and neglecting the earliest discussions; sciences are confirming many operational aspects of the Buddhist mind-construction. It is clear that the ancient Buddhists did not have full comprehension of body-organs and things like neurons and the transferring of chemicals. For instance, the ancient Buddhists didn't know about the physical eye.

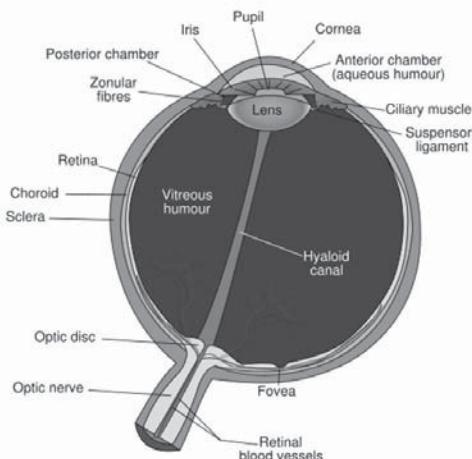
The ancient Buddhist 'eye' is different from the modern medical eye, the body-organ used to detect light in two dimensions. Eyes allow humans to see variances in levels of light and darkness, hues of colors, and depth-perception [two eyes viewing an object in 2D give the perception of 3D] – sensitive, of course, to the primary elements [*materiality*].<sup>153</sup> Eyes are positioned in the heads of species dependent on the living-style of the being [*most species have their eyes on the sides of their heads; however predators have their eyes in a more forward position*]. Humans do not possess the most advanced eye-system – the superior vision-gifted species belongs to the mantis-shrimp, with its hyper-spectral color vision [*ultra-violet and infrared*]. Each mantis-shrimp eye operates independently, enabling a variety of perspectives.<sup>154</sup>

Modern medical-scientists think that the human eye just sees portions of space and time. The brain interprets this limited, two-dimensional information, and groups images from memory to perceive or represent the world as known. There is evidence of between 10 and 12 output channels from the eye to the brain, each carrying a different, stripped-down representation of the visual world. The images are then reconstructed to provide information. This suggests retina creates a stack of image-representations. Image representations are formed and cross-talk between layers of cells

<sup>153</sup> Bhikkhu Nānamoli [trns]: Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 443 [XIV 38]

<sup>154</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantis\\_shrimp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantis_shrimp) - accessed on 17 September 2008

in the retina occurs.<sup>155</sup> However, the Visuddhimagga suggests that the eye has seven layers<sup>156</sup> – these cannot be seen in the modern interpretation or understanding of the eye – and may be a conceptual-error that future Buddhists should never again replicate, which is why this refutation is necessary – to mention what should be corrected in Buddhist ‘wisdom’:



The Saṅgīti Sutta also recognizes other types of eyes: the divine eye, and the eye of wisdom [The *Mahaniddesa*<sup>157</sup> lists five: the first three mentioned here, plus the Buddha-eye and the All-Seeing Eye – as does the *Atthasālini*<sup>158</sup>]. According to the Dhātu-Yamaka, the Divine Eye and the Eye of Wisdom are called “eye” but they are not called “eye-element.”<sup>159</sup> What is the Divine Eye [*dibba-cakkhu*]? The Visuddhimagga<sup>160</sup> spends a great deal of time on the detailed characteristics of this

<sup>155</sup> [http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2001/03/28\\_wers1.html](http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2001/03/28_wers1.html) - accessed 17 September 2008 relating to the paper by Frank S. Werblin, professor of molecular and cell biology in the College of Letters & Science at UC Berkeley. Also see: <http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2001/03/images/retinalmovie.mov>

<sup>156</sup> Bhikkhu Nānamoli [trns]: Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 445 [XIV 48]

<sup>157</sup> P.A. Payutto: Dictionary of Buddhism (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press, 2000), p. 190-191

<sup>158</sup> Pe Maung Tin: The Expositor – Atthasālini – Buddhaghosa’s Commentary on the Dhammasanāpi, the First Book of the Abhidhamma-piṭaka (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1999), p. 402-407

<sup>159</sup> U Nārada Mūla Paṭṭhāna Sayadaw & Thein Nyun: Discourse on Elements – Dhātu-Kathā (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1999), p. xxi

<sup>160</sup> Bhikkhu Nānamoli [trns]: Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 418-425 [XIII 72-101]

‘perceived’-eye power – largely being: the knowledge of passing away and reappearance of beings. With this power – the *directed or inclined mind* can determine the destination of beings after their death according to performed deeds. The *divine* [in the sense that it is similar to the eye of a deity] *eye* [in the sense of ‘seeing’] is a characteristic of those with abilities surpassing the normal human [as one watching beings]. The divine eye can be developed through methods such as the fire kasina and *jhānas*.<sup>161</sup> For it is written: “...when visible objects that are not within the focus of the bhikkhu’s fleshy eye come into the focus of his eye of knowledge [synonym for divine eye] – that is to say... that the divine eye has arisen... not the preliminary-work consciousness.<sup>162</sup> To recover: the divine eye is knowledge and intention [thus ‘mental’] to see beyond apparent obstacles. What is the Eye of Wisdom [*paññā-cakkhu*]? It might be best to quote a footnote in full: “The opening of the Dhamma-eye (dhamma-cakkhu) is a term for ‘entering the stream’ and thus being set irrevocably on the path. ...it is superior to the divine eye, which is a superior kind of clairvoyance, and below the wisdom-eye, which is the wisdom of the Arahant.”<sup>163</sup> Here, in the *Dīgha-Nikāya*, the wisdom-eye is a power of an Arahant. The *Visuddhimagga*<sup>164</sup> suggests that *paññā* here is: penetration into the **characteristics** of impermanence, suffering and non-self; and understanding and utilizing the eye to penetrate into its own states of essence; **functioning** to eradicate *ignorance* [the darkness of delusion], concealing the individual essence of states. This wisdom-eye **manifests** as non-delusion; and its **proximate cause** is concentration. So, we can see and affirm how modern sciences bring useful and valuable information into religious and public-discourses, and if religions or social-guidance philosophies don’t adapt to these new findings then they can no longer remain relevant.

<sup>161</sup> Bhikkhu Nānamoli [trns]: *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 423 [XIII 95]

<sup>162</sup> Bhikkhu Nānamoli [trns]: *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 425 [XIII 100]

<sup>163</sup> Maurice Walshe: *The Long Discourses of the Buddha – A Translation of the Dīgha-Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), p. 547-548

<sup>164</sup> Bhikkhu Nānamoli [trns]: *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), p. 437 [XIV 7]

Žižek goes on to mention that we have a notion of a self, but that when we search for this construction we encounter only, as he says: passing, elusive mental events, and suggests that this is just ethico-epistemology – or some mistake that humans have been making since we have learned to express ourselves through conventional language. The thing to do, as Žižek urges, is to get rid of the delusion of the notion of a self – but ponders if this is just some unavoidable conclusion. We can also ponder the uselessness of the ideas uselessly discussed through ontology – it appears that social works are more advantageous for society. He ponders onward, if the “I” is like the ultimate void, or the center of the vortex of mental events – while there is no ‘substantive positive identity’, it serves as a useful, but unrepresentable point of reference. He gathers that there must be some causal-coherence and integrity of some sort of self over time – and that this may be known as inaccessible subjectivity – or as if we are looking in the wrong place. He tries to conclude by mentioning that the transcendental horizons or the scientific domain can only phenomenalize scientific knowledge since we have limitations with our ability or approach to comprehend what is real.

Recently Prof. Žižek gave another lecture, available on Youtube<sup>165</sup>, where he begins the by asserting: Buddhism is a very open-system, and that his remarks will only be to intentionally provoke the audience, and he even proclaims that it is in his nature to be evil.<sup>166</sup> Žižek says there are two features in today’s capitalist predicament: global capitalism and the role of silence – the later was never discussed in the video. He didn’t venture into some discussion over which versions of Buddhism would be the most authentic – as he might have done above: this is only crucial for specialists to ponder, though he discusses what he sees wrong with elements of Western-Buddhism, as a distinct brand from the traditional three-vehicles. He asserts that Western Buddhism

<sup>165</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkTUQYxEUjs&feature=endscreen&NR=1> – Slavoj Žižek: The Buddhist Ethic and the Spirit of Global Capitalism (2012) - accessed on 25 November 2012

<sup>166</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=iJCcLQHVT8c#!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=iJCcLQHVT8c#!) – Slavoj Žižek: Lacanian Theology and Buddhism, 2012 – accessed on 5 December 2012 and he also mentions that he likes to intentionally provoke people here, again – so obviously, it is indeed in his nature: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm\\_dR-XMSY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm_dR-XMSY) – Slavoj Žižek: The Irony of Buddhism, 2012

presents itself as the remedy [*satiation/opium*] against the frantic dimensions of capitalism, allowing us to have inner-peace and enlightenment.<sup>167</sup> He says, without a reference, that about 80 percent of the top managers practice some sort of meditation. Our fragile existence, through Buddhist ontology, is fleeting, everything can fall apart – so managers are correct: to be fully engaged in the market, people get crazy – so someone needs the distance. Business need this ‘bullshit’ [*chances are most of these people engaged in Buddhistic-concepts are not serious about the ethical-training that Buddhism provides, but are only interested in reducing their level of stress – not taking full advantage of the Buddhist-system*], to function better or more perfectly [*and we know that capitalistic-businesses are not completely interested in ethics, since their goal is maximizing profit*].

Žižek asserts that he takes Buddhism very seriously.<sup>168</sup> He appreciates the cognitive-breakthroughs that assist our comprehension of our brains.<sup>169</sup> Žižek then leads us into material pertaining to psychoanalysis, fitting territory, as he asserts: there is really nothing but resistance [*opposing the ‘self’*] to be analyzed<sup>170</sup>, and is an unnecessary metaphor in place towards awareness and knowing. [In another older text, he concludes: “...the final stage of the psychoanalytic process: ‘subjective-destitution’. What is at stake in this ‘destitution’ is precisely the fact that the subject no longer presupposes himself as subject; by accomplishing this, he annuls, so to speak, the effects of the act of formal conversion. In other words, he assumes not the existence but the non-existence of the big Other; he accepts the Real in its utter, meaningless idiocy;

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<sup>167</sup> Further see where this is additionally discussed: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/western.php> - this website features Žižek's own article, but focuses on the idea that Buddhism, for westerners, may just be some fetish-like replacement for their frustrations with capitalism. This is a sentiment that he echoes during this speech on Buddhism and Global Capitalism.

<sup>168</sup> See for instance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=SP6G7XqzK94&NR=1> – This lecture by Žižek features an introduction which claims that Žižek has recently converted to Buddhism. I think he said this jokingly.

<sup>169</sup> See for instance: <http://arcade.stanford.edu/Zižek-buddhism> - This website is suggesting, based on clicking on other links associated with the page, that there is another realm, the realm of psychoanalysis, which must include comprehension of Freud or Lacan [the works of both are unfamiliar to me], and this is an endeavor that I am not prepared to venture into, nor care to participate within [owing to their constant discussion of aspects of sexuality, which is not my preferred genre of research or concern].

<sup>170</sup> Slavoj Žižek: Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism (London: Verso 2012), p. 130

*he keeps open the gap between the Real and its symbolization. The price to be paid for this is that by the same act he also annuls himself as subject... the subject is subject only in so far as he presupposes himself as absolute through the movement of double reflection.”<sup>171</sup>] Buddhists should balance between or comprehend one’s levels of ignorance and wisdom. [Between ‘ignorance’ and ‘wisdom’ may be layers of resistance that prohibit the acquisition of knowledge and its development towards wisdom.] Speaking as a Buddhist, he states that there is great pain within one’s mind during this shift: “...first, we isolate the thing that bothers us, the cause of our suffering; then we change not the object but ourselves [this is all we can do, and thus the earlier illumination of brain-washing or indoctrination into propaganda], the way we relate to what appears as the cause of our suffering.”<sup>172</sup> He asserts that this is often a violent experience of losing one’s mindfulness, or viewpoints. He claims Buddhists are often facing involuntary injustices: “How could she do this to me? I don’t deserve to be treated that way.” [Most recently, this could apply to the developments related to the expansion of the copper-mine near Monywa, Myanmar.<sup>173</sup>] So, after gaining insight into the fleeting illusion of the self, we can repair our damaged mindstate. [If people, including monks protecting their temple-land, did not possess such a mind full of constructions like material-ownership of the land, they might not have protested against the development of the copper-mine, and would have moved on to another plot of land or gotten adequate compensation from the government to appease those with a troubled mind.] If suffering is to be eliminated, is nibbana found in the middle-zone away from minimalistic or maximized perspectives?*

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<sup>171</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso Books, 1989), p. 263

<sup>172</sup> Slavoj Žižek: Less Than Nothing – Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism (London: Verso 2012), p. 130

<sup>173</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20536992> - the answer is within the story: It is happening to you because the Chinese are a more powerful force, using the native Burmese Army against the Buddhists, so that its economic goals can be attained – the protests would serve to disrupt the acquisition of material, and this could be against some government agreement that was signed by the capitalistic enterprise. It is baffling how soldiers of one nation would turn against its own people over a foreign-nation’s whim. See: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/20064> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20539455> - for more photographs. People can also see the response by a popular Nobel laureate: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/20145> - all sites accessed on 29 November 2012.

It's very evident that the neurosciences are being better received, and much of the discovered-functions run parallel with the assertions of Buddhism. The brain-sciences are examining the ego, and its illusion – but the problem is how to subjectify this – the everyday sense of a socialized agent. Buddhism does this well, through three attitudes: resign the self to get between the gap of scientific view and the everyday self as a materialistic free-agent; the second view is the Habermasian-position – the fully asserted duality as a non-naturalist aspect – not just a tolerated illusion but an illumination of transcendental scientific-reasoning; and then some reflection of our own naïve ideology: when an earthquake occurs it must be due to something related to the progression of a Buddha (or as lighting must be a message from a god). Žižek loves the idea that the debates with neurosciences with Buddhism have brought – and points to a scientific-experiment that there is really no free-will [*a body was hooked up with electrodes and was shocked when someone picked up the object that they were supposed to get, eventually there was no free-will; also there is another experiment involving no free-will: a person types on a key board, but the electrodes measure the ideas before the consciousness dictates*<sup>174</sup>.] He continues to claim that there is no real freedom, that everything presupposes some other agents involved in our processes which may inhibit a decision.

Buddhism does seem to be the ideal mode for a reaction against capitalism and fits in with the ideas of modern-sciences. Buddhism is concerned with the problem of suffering - this is the principle condition: no living being wants to suffer. However a Freudian-Lacanian has a problem with the issue: we don't want to suffer; but for those in love, and in a love that ends tragically, there was so much suffering. With our passionate-engagements [*knowledge that we comprehend how love may end tragically but that we only have an aspiration that it should not fail*], we are ready to suffer [*and may actually be suffering or experiencing suffering*]. The source of suffering may be for the quest in things [*elemental amounts of greed, hatred, delusions*] that will never satisfy someone, and this is

<sup>174</sup> See for instance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ4nwTTmcgs> and to refute the ideas: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCM5BFU01YU> – where conscious free-will does not generate our motions – accessed on 29 November 2012.

the roots to suffering. Liberation from suffering is enlightenment or nibbana, and Buddhism is built for this attainment.<sup>175</sup> Morality is also enforced towards gradually training this liberation from suffering.

Žižek's attention is also drawn to the fact that Buddhism is not just meditation but is a way of life, and the nations of Southeast Asia are briefly mentioned: meditation in these nations rarely enter into daily dialogues – ignoring the rounds of specialists, it is only a fixed-point of reference to give you hope, like an aspiration to go to heaven or travel on a vacation. Žižek is surely disregarding the physical evidence: temples are everywhere in Thailand, monks are always written about in the newspapers, there is a vibrant amulet trade, there are TV/Radio programs full of Dhamma-programming – meditation in reality, in Thailand for example, permeates this culture where 'religion' is an official aspect of the national ideology. Perhaps, much to the dismay of Žižek, the common population here is highly involved with Buddhism.

Žižek then asks: how do we fight the enslavement of desires? *[In the materialistic-culture that dominates the nation, seemingly overpowering the nation, people are succumbing more and more to these consumeristic-desires.]* There are no higher-powers in Buddhism, ignore the later idea of kamma. Kamma is only imminent into the idea of our actions despite the transformation that the term has been given as a conceptual idea as a mechanism to control society through living in fear. Codependence is also a Stalinistic idea of dialectic-unity. So the idea of kamma is not some divine activity: our actions have consequences, so in this way this is a method for regulating our acts. Common sense *[although I was trained to*

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<sup>175</sup> For instance, here: <http://lacan.com/symptom12/?p=186> - In: "Why the Idea and Why Communism?", Prof. Žižek states: "...for [in] Buddhism, we are all equal, in Nirvana." This seems to be a misconception. Why? It's my perspective of the general Theravada doctrine that there is no equality in the sense of someone's level of abilities. Sure we all have an ability to do something, but to the degree that someone may excel or fail is an individual mechanism. In terms of Nibbana, I could agree: for everyone, the criteria for the attainment of Nibbana, or rather what falls away for extinguishes for everyone should be the same to allow for attaining Nibbana – but there are many paths or directions [methods] for attaining nibbana, and these are not equal methods, and are dependent on some person's abilities. Each person has differing personality characteristics. Some method may not be within someone, but an alternate method may be sufficient towards that person's quest towards perfection.

*not have the sense of the lower-minded echelon of the general population – we should always strive to have a greater level of intelligence, to have common-sense is an insult]* is then a basic step of morality: body, speech and mind are the levels at which acts are performed.

The idea is to acquire dispassion towards objects of clinging – imagine this as a venture away from materialism. Now in terms of samsara, which breaks from the idea of kamma: you must step out from the continuous chain of actions and consequences. Stepping out is just like a change in someone's attitude. An emerging problem is the ambiguity in the teachings itself: the guy who goes through this may be a bodhisatta – the one who wants to free all sentient beings, not just himself. In another text, Žižek discusses the principles of a bodhisatta philosophically: “Lacan has nothing to do with the mystical suspension of ties which bind us to ordinary reality, with attaining the bliss of radical indifference in which life or death and other worldly distinctions no longer matter, in which life or death and object, thought and act, fully coincide. To put it in mystical terms, the Lacanian act is, rather, the exact opposite of this ‘return to innocence’: original-sin itself, the abyssal disturbance of primeval Peace, the primordial ‘pathological’ Choice of unconditional attachment to some specific object - like falling in love with a specific person who, thereafter, matters to us more than anything else.”<sup>176</sup>

Žižek additionally progresses into another matter: “In Buddhist terms, the Lacanian act is the exact structural obverse of Enlightenment, of attaining nirvana: the very gesture by means of which the Void is disturbed [for instance: *have you ever gone through the threshold of a closed door: when opened you can feel the rush of air move past your face – that feeling of progression or movement – you have transferred into the Void or you have become part of this void – and it must be said or considered in a non-materialistic sense; there is a distinct phase-transfer between these mental-realms*], and Difference (and with it, false appearance and suffering) emerges in the world. [Our ‘entry’ into ‘nibbana’ has

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<sup>176</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 22

*interrupted or interfered with the ‘voidness’ of the Void... populated by another uninvited addition.]* The act is this close to the gesture of [the] Bodhisattva who, having reached nirvana, out of compassion – that is, for the sake of the common Good – goes back to phenomenal reality in order to help all other living beings to achieve nirvana.”<sup>177</sup> When Žižek moves into the nature of gesture of the Bodhisattva, he says a bodhisattva ‘goes to back to phenomenal reality’ – and I am not certain this is the case unless he is referring to the Buddha, as a former bodhisattva, who died and then in the future life was born in this materialistic-world for the sake of helping us here towards bringing us into nibbana – as if giving future generations some hope that they too can [*apart from senselessly waiting centuries*] see the future-Buddha [*a completely different being from the last one, the Buddha Gotama*]. Žižek thinks that this delayed transfer of assistance is a false gesture, not genuine, and may be motivates by some ultimately unwholesome desire. Why the postponement?

Žižek determines: “...in order to arrive at the act proper, one should erase any reference to the Good, and do the act just for the sake of it. This reference to Bodhisattva also enables us to answer the big-question: if now we have to strive to break out of the vicious cycle of craving into the blissful peace of nirvana, how did nirvana “regress” into getting caught in the wheel of craving in the first place? [*This is another misconception that should not have been stated, since Nibbana by definition or design is completely outside of the wheel of craving: if there is any craving, once can be said to not be resident in Nibbana – perhaps of course if it is some conventional craving, like the necessity to go to the bathroom, and one must delay for some reason.*] The only consistent answer is: Bodhisattva repeats this primordial ‘evil’ gesture. The fall into Evil was accomplished by the original-Bodhisattva – in short: the ultimate source of Evil is compassion itself.”<sup>178</sup> [In some discussion with colleagues, we could not determine any textual reference for this statement, but we can see how from our genuine, pure intention, someone could determine that we are evil – in what was the best example: a father was asked by his young

<sup>177</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), pp. 22-23

<sup>178</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 23

son about how babies are made, and after the story by the father, the son still was in disbelief. The father thought some more, and decided if the son did not believe the words, what if the son saw the action: the father showed the son about 5-seconds of a porno-clip from the internet, to show only the act of penetration – and then the son understood. Later in the evening, the father told the mother of the boy what had happened earlier in the day, and the wife became irate towards her husband that he had shown something ‘bad’ to the son. The husband (father of the boy) had to defend himself for the action, determining that there was only wholesome intention and genuine instruction, due to the son’s question. In yet another example of Evil being rooted in Compassion: the act of ‘giving’ food, requisites, or small monetary donations to a bhikkhu or the temple was also determined to be ‘evil’. A person may give something compassionately to the Sangha, but it is rooted in the hopes that the gift will bring a greater-spiritual or kamma-reward, and it is said that the larger the gift the larger the reward will become. However, while we can see the development of evil in this matter, we are aware that the greatest gift according to the Buddha is the gift of education, a real miracle; and we know that in terms of offerings: thinking about loving-kindness for a fraction of a second is more valuable than giving almsfood to an arahant. None of these two acts: giving loving-kindness or instruction is a materialistic-offering, and these noble-mental ideals are more valuable than material items.

Žižek asserts that there is some ‘pleasure principle’ that governs our actions, and that we “misperceive the true nature of the Good” [*Really we might misperceive, if we look back to the origins of our traditions, when, say: the Zoroastrians or what existed prior to them might have asserted that the Asuras were benevolent beings, and the Devas were wicked; however, with the agricultural-society transferred into the urbanizing societies, the Devas were able to represent a new reality for some, thereby taking on greater characteristics. Asuras became good-beings for the Zoroastrians while Devas were the bastions of Evil; and for the Brahmanists, the Devas were the embodiment of Good, while the Asuras were the antagonistic element.<sup>179</sup>]* – because we have:

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<sup>179</sup> Karen Armstrong: The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious

“the paradox of [*truly*] wanting unhappiness’ of finding excessive suffering itself... [*why else would we fall in love knowing that our hearts will be destroyed when the relationship terminates?*], ...the Buddhist ethical horizon is therefore still that of the good ... Buddhism is a kind of negative of the ethics of Good [*Again: trace the development of the Asura/Deva appreciation – a certain amount of negative turns might eventually turn back into something positive – a double-turn. The realm or tribal-territory of the Asuras is considered a miserable place, a woeful plane, populated by miserable spirits, sometimes dwelling in villages living of the remains of discarded foods.*<sup>180</sup>]: aware that every positive good is a lure [*an enticing trap?*], it fully assumes the Void as the only true Good. What it cannot do is to pass beyond nothing...[*Nibbana is supposed to be the ‘something beyond nothing’, in the sense that ‘nothingness’ is only the 30<sup>th</sup> Level of the Realms of Existence, the next real is the ‘Realm of Neither-Perception nor Non-Perception’ – and outside of this structure, again: outside of this structure, beyond it, is Nibbana.*<sup>181</sup>] tarrying with the negative... to a Something which gives body to the Nothing. [*‘Nothing’ is not-progressive enough for Buddhists.*] The Buddhist endeavor to get rid of the illusion of craving, of phenomenal reality, is in effect, the endeavor to get rid of the Real... the kernel of the Real... - our stubborn attachment to the illusion.”<sup>182</sup> [*Everything that we comprehend is built on false-premises, and we should reeducate ourselves into the real nature of the examined-phenomena.*]

There are three notions of a bodhisatta, none of which are sourced as some list in Theravada Buddhism – so the idea may be without a legitimate reference: one that wants to be a Buddha as soon as possible, caring little for others, and only later helping them – like some sort of king; then there is the one who is more communist – yes, but together with others as if taking a boat with them to another location; and the final level is the greatest ethical act – enlightenment

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Traditions (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), pp. 3-30

<sup>180</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi: Abhidhammattha Sangaha: A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000), pp. 190, 195

<sup>181</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi: Abhidhammattha Sangaha: A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000), pp. 186-187 – of which there is little knowledge available about this realm.

<sup>182</sup> Slavoj Žižek: The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 23

is postponed and attained but out of compassion would go back into the realm of suffering and give the priority to them – although more common-thought was that he would be like a sheppard and guide the herd first before then achieving the final-aim.

Theravada Buddhism though [*and he is on their side*]: it has nothing to do with spirituality, fully here in the realm of the world, but the attitude changes, as one is still socially active. Radical Buddhism [*which he could see as something derived from Theravada Buddhism, like some sort of engaged-Buddhism*] would isolate the cause of suffering and put blame on others: the eternal “why me?” question - stop blaming desires. What is extinguished is only a false view as seen as such – only the perspective of the observer seeing the same world through the illusory-perspective.

First you do morality to prepare yourself towards enlightenment. Buddhists are really honest: once fully enlightened ween what others see as an evil act can be rationalized as some enlightened-perspective since there is no kamma – but where was the compassion for others? He said that the Dalai Lama stated that if drinking alcohol helps someone then they can do it. Can drugs induce someone into Nibbana permanently – in a biochemical way? [Žižek asserts: “I take a pill, fuck-you, I’m there!”] The cultivation of virtue should be eminent, but there are others who disagree. Who then would want to suffer pointlessly in a cold mountain cave unnecessarily?

He discusses a view of Zen Buddhism and God, through two points: until all beings are brought together through infinite peace, therefore to bring into harmony – killing and war are necessary mentioning that this could be something that Hitler might have appreciated. The source of compassion yields the sword.<sup>183</sup> Žižek states that Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki [*maybe the most influential individual upon the American Zen-Buddhist system – Žižek is obviously not a fan of Suzuki, though he found some of his earliest writings useful.*<sup>184</sup>] brought out this point: war is a necessary evil to

<sup>183</sup> This story is also mentioned in his book: Slavoj Žižek: The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 27

<sup>184</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm\\_dR-XMSY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kwm_dR-XMSY): “Fuck Suzuki!”, at 1:21:48 – accessed on 5 December 2012

bring out the better good. When someone is still the agent of their acts, they feel responsible. If a person reaches nibbana, they would no longer experience oneself as the active agent of the act, just the impassive observer which meditates these crazy times. The enemy appears and makes himself the victim. The sword is a function of justice that also performs mercy. Getting rid of a false self, makes a person into a better warrior. Therefore, with proper distance, one can perform better.

He does not assert that enlightenment is a joke that enables militant-killers to function better, that was better left for Suzuki and the Japanese kamikazes – it is an authentic existential experience, a technique for stepping out of the kamma. To be a truly radical Buddhist you must accept the gaps. If the true point of compassion is to bring you to the dispassionate attitude for seeing the nature of things this must be done. The true test to see if someone is enlightened, would be for them to do something really horrible – with a distance. For example: Pol Pot was the example of the distance that he had with the people, although we cannot be so certain that he was truly enlightened. Žižek mentions: what Buddhists see as evil is the good things for Christians: Christian love is attachment for Buddhists; and Christianity is a religion of separation, not of harmony. All other religions want to unite the world.

In his text, *Living in the End Times*, Žižek asserts that Buddhism falls into some sort of trap: allowing violence to be inflicted through a non-violent attitude – through inner peace and distance. He states that the Buddha said that there will never be peace in the world, but that if we have infinite compassion, these are better steps. Sometimes, according to the Japanese Zen Buddhist source that he sites, killing and war are necessary.<sup>185</sup> He later states that there is no manipulative perversion of authentic compassionate insight: the total immersion into the self-less ‘now’ of instant enlightenment... in which discipline coincides with spontaneity – perfectly legitimizes one’s subordination to the militaristic social machine.<sup>186</sup> He asserts that the Buddhist stance on compassion is really the quality of indifference, and it is this quenching of

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<sup>185</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 19

<sup>186</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 99

all passions which strive to establish differences.<sup>187</sup> Again, he uses the same story, with lesser analysis in his previous text<sup>188</sup>, there asserting: the soldier is just the passive observer of one's own acts... [the] Buddha's gaze could well function as the support of the most ruthless killing machine – and people who have engaged in any kind of sport-fighting or violence know how to train the body and mind to perform under such circumstances, where the mind is quite removed from the action – the trained mechanics of killing may indeed be done with a passive mind.

Enlightenment is authentic but it comes after one is emerged in life. We are there like animals, but how do you create the space for nibbana - by requiring distance from being emerged in ordinary life? You cannot get into nibbana from natural life. You must fall from excessive attachment into a void, and from the void you can enter into nibbana. The Buddha wondered how to get them out of suffering? How did we fall in? - is another question. Was samsara a fact or how did we get caught in the illusion? As a pragmatic person, the Buddha was not concerned with metaphysics; or to understand that once you are in nibbana, you don't care; or the final idea there is a dark side of power where there is a higher domain of peace. So: what if something went wrong?

## Conclusion:

If this conclusion may take on a personal tone: I feel that Žižek has a proper comprehension of Buddhism once everything he has discussed is considered. I'm not sure if he engages in meditation, in his private moments, but this could assist in presenting things more coherently. I think as much as he swipes at his nose and tugs on his t-shirts during public lectures, he probably cannot endure too many moments of uninterrupted stillness and silence. He has been interested to some extent with Buddhism for more than 40 years, and has written bits and pieces here and there in several of his texts about Buddhism. I feel that the common person – the non-Buddhist – reading his texts could trust the opinion or interpretation of Professor Žižek.

<sup>187</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 99

<sup>188</sup> Slavoj Žižek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf – The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 29

Some people within the field of Buddhist Studies are getting annoyed over the published material that propagates some inadequate doctrinal comprehension of the messages espoused by the Buddha. There are scholars or teachers with their partisan agenda, incorporating their Judeo-Christian ideals or Western ontological interpretations – all of which are generally later ideas used to illuminate their comprehension of the material already discussed by the Buddha. We already saw above how, D.T. Suzuki, Watts and his Chinese Yin-Yang idea was used, out of place, to comprehend Buddhist doctrines. It may be some useful idea for someone, but it is: not Buddhist, despite efforts to distort the imagery, again, towards fitting it into someone's agenda. These foreign ideas that are infiltrating Buddhist-thought may be unrecognizable by the non-specialist of Buddhism. Žižek may fall into this category, despite his years of reading and being involved in pop-culture; but then he is trying to bring this information into the Western-world, through his platform.

Žižek is correct to say that Buddhism is operating on ancient principles. Take my own refutation pertaining to the description or composition of the eye. Additionally, although I find the discussion pertaining to ontology as unproductive for a Buddhist to engage in, the discussion on kamma was interesting, because he suggests: who mandates that we have to even step inside the cycle of suffering? Žižek further mentions that there are distinctions between rural and urban ways of thinking – as if one is more sophisticated or superior over the other. In relation to kamma: if our deeds are tragically haunting us, as Žižek asserts, is this the pessimistic approach to kamma and are we resigned to some pre-destined fate even though as youths we were not mature enough to comprehend fate or our role with enabling ourselves to develop fully and productively towards nibbana? It is extremely difficult to accept, wholly, the entire conceptual doctrine of kamma, and therefore there must be a better solution or approach since a weakness is seen. I'm finding the here-and-now perspective or approach to Dhamma as something more manageable and appropriate to our modern circumstances – and it is this approach to Dhamma that I strongly advocate in my teachings.

Perhaps a radical reconciliation of what we determine to be as “Buddhism”, will be the key to our liberation from our perception of reality. We should liberate ourselves and enter into the Great Void [*the concept of emptiness – having an empty-mind*] - Nibbana. In conventional life we are always enslaved and we had no voice about our position in Samsara – no option for participating – it is only now that we have matured that we have finally seen ways out – so we can begin to plot our escape if we change only our perspectives. What is being shown here is that the transformative ideas are only mental ideas. I am reminded by a song that I sing often to my children: “...emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds...” – and this was actually derived from a speech by the Honorable Marcus Garvey, who in a speech, stated: “...we are going to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because whilst others might free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind. Mind is your only ruler, sovereign. The man who is not able to develop and use his mind is bound to be the slave of the other man who uses his mind.”<sup>189</sup> Never fall into some trap; there is always an escape – anyone can attain liberation.

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<sup>189</sup> <http://henriettavintondavis.wordpress.com/2010/03/24/redemption-song/> - accessed on 1 December 2012

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