



Buddhism and the Construction of the Enemy

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Research of the psychologist Witkin demonstrates that we prefer two main styles of thinking, in a continuum of cognition. The pluralist cognitive style places a primary emphasis on differences. The globalist cognitive style emphasises identity. Some cognisers prefer a synthesis of both styles. The dynamics of preferred cognitive styles works across both institutions and religious traditions.

Familial, social and cultural consensus structures reality a certain way. Thus, individuals, institutions and other groups promote and reinforce sophisticated forms of discrimination that produces and reinforces 'self' over against 'other.' Here, strict preference of one particular cognitive style can lead to perception of 'the other' as 'the enemy.' That is, the movement of perceived pluralism to its extreme tends to radicalise the 'self' and the 'other,' whereby the 'other' becomes perceived and demonised as the 'enemy.'

The dynamics of preferred cognitive styles can be applied to Buddhist meditation. In its own way, Buddhist contemplative praxis, through a convenient marriage of intellectual and intuitive knowledge, thus aims to reconnect consciously with the primordial ground or emptiness (*śūnyatā*), i.e. the void potential that produces the plurality of all things in existence.

Buddhist contemplative practices involve a synthesis of both cognitive styles that lead to a revision of the notion of 'self' wherein there is a conflation of 'one' and 'many.' When thinking stops, and the constructed boundary of 'inner' and 'outer' is known as invalid, the contemplative eventually penetrates through to the central realisation that one derives from emptiness, while being the universe itself. Thereby arises the opportunity to engender great compassion.

From this, the meditator knows fully that the so-called 'other' or 'enemy' is an erroneous perception with profound implications. In this way, familiar scenes and situations are transformed in the most positive way.