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The Cycle of Samsara and the Illusion of the Promised Land: A Buddhist Perspective on Human Suffering and Enlightenment in the Lens of Israelites and Palestinian Conflicts

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Abstract

The notion of heaven and hell has long been a subject of theological and philosophical discourse across cultures. In particular, the concept of *Samsara*, the eternal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, presents a unique lens through which the notion of human suffering and the pursuit of enlightenment can be understood. This paper explores the hypothesis that human beings, caught in cycles of ignorance and error, often fail to learn from their mistakes, leading to recurring patterns of suffering. Drawing from Buddhist teachings and other philosophical traditions, the paper argues that the human condition, as exemplified by the tragic history of the Jewish people and their pursuit of a "Promised Land," serves as an illustration of the cycle of Samsara. The ultimate realization of the truth, however, requires breaking free from these cycles of ignorance and delusion.

Keywords: Eutopia, Jannah, Behesht, Paradise, Promised land, Israel-Palestine

Introduction

The human experience is often marked by cycles of suffering, ignorance, and error, which Buddhists refer to as *Samsara*—the wheel of birth, death, and rebirth (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024). Central to Buddhist teachings is the idea that ignorance (*avidya*) leads to suffering, and that breaking free from these cycles is essential for achieving liberation (*nirvana*). The concept of *Samsara* is not just a metaphysical or religious idea but can also be applied to historical and social contexts. This paper posits that the human propensity to repeat mistakes, as seen in historical tragedies such as the events surrounding the Jewish people and the Nazi regime followed by the cycle of crimes in the occupied land of Palestine and reflects the deeper patterns of ignorance and delusion inherent in the human condition. We already studied the concept of the Eutopia and Promised land in different categories of philosophy and religion (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024) in more details. The myth of the "Promised Land" and the realization of heaven on earth, especially in the context of the Israeli state and the criminal encounters in several folds both from Nazis and the Zionist governments, serves as an allegory for the endless cycles of *Samsara*, where the pursuit of a utopian ideal often leads to further suffering and violence.

The Cycle of Ignorance and Error in Human History

The hypothesis presented in this study is that humans, particularly those in positions of power or living in states of material affluence, are often blind to the consequences of their actions. They fail to learn from past mistakes and continue repeating them, either due to ignorance or willful disregard for the truth. The paper draws upon the Buddhist concept of *Samsara* to explain this phenomenon: humans, in their ignorance, fail to recognize the deeper truths of existence, and thus remain trapped in cycles of suffering.

One of the most poignant historical examples of this ignorance is the experience of the Jewish people. The story of the "Promised Land" and the eventual establishment of the Israeli state is fraught with tragic irony. The Jews, who endured centuries of suffering, displacement, and genocide, ultimately sought to create their own utopian society, only to find themselves embroiled in cycles of violence, territorial conflict, and the oppression of others. The paradox is that in their pursuit of a "Promised Land"—a vision of

heaven on earth—they inadvertently perpetuate suffering and injustice, repeating the same mistakes they once endured.

In this sense, the experience of the Jewish people exemplifies the Buddhist view of Samsara: the cycle of suffering is not simply about physical birth and death but is also about the repetition of harmful patterns, whether individual or collective. *Samsara* is, in essence, the inability to break free from ignorance and the cyclical nature of human behavior.

The Forbidden Fruit: A Buddhist Allegory of Enlightenment

The concept of the "forbidden fruit" is a metaphor that appears in various religious and philosophical traditions. In the Biblical narrative, Adam and Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden represents humanity's fall from grace, a transition from innocence to knowledge. Similarly, in Buddhist thought, the path to enlightenment involves overcoming the desires and delusions that keep one trapped in the cycle of Samsara.

In this paper, the "forbidden fruit" symbolizes the rejection of the status quo and the willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. The idea that "heaven" or utopia is an illusion, and that true enlightenment requires going beyond conventional social norms and political ideologies, resonates with Buddhist teachings on non-attachment and the impermanence of worldly phenomena (*anicca*). The pursuit of a perfect society—whether through religious or political means—often leads to further suffering, as it is rooted in the illusion of permanence and the inability to confront deeper truths about human nature.

Buddhist teachings emphasize that the pursuit of enlightenment is not a journey that leads to external rewards, but an inward journey of understanding. *Samsara* is driven by attachment to the self and a refusal to let go of illusions, whether they are related to wealth, power, or ideological purity. Thus, the "forbidden fruit" represents the breaking of attachments to false ideals and the willingness to embrace the difficult process of self-realization and truth.

Heaven and Hell in the Context of Social and Political Structures

The concept of heaven and hell is not only a theological one but also deeply embedded in social and political structures. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the notion of the "Promised Land" reflects a societal belief in a utopian vision that, when actualized, results in exclusion, violence, and oppression of the Other. The

establishment of Israel as a state, while a response to centuries of suffering, also perpetuates cycles of violence and suffering for others, illustrating the Buddhist idea that suffering is inherent in attachment to worldly goals.

The Israeli example, while specific, offers insights into the broader human condition. Whether one is striving for political power, territorial control, or religious purity, the Buddhist perspective reminds us that attachment to any worldly ideal without awareness of its impermanence and potential for harm will inevitably lead to suffering. *Samsara* manifests not only in personal attachments but in the collective behavior of societies that refuse to confront the deeper truths of their actions.

The Illusion of the "Promised Land"

The historical narrative surrounding the Jewish people is emblematic of the human tendency to seek a "Promised Land," a utopian destination that promises peace, prosperity, and justice. However, as history has demonstrated, such promises often lead to new cycles of suffering. This is where the Buddhist concept of *Samsara* provides a valuable framework: the cycle of desire for the "Promised Land" is just another form of attachment, one that prevents individuals and societies from seeing the true nature of their suffering.

The illusion of the "Promised Land" is akin to the illusion of *Nirvana* for many who misunderstand its true nature. In the Buddhist tradition, *Nirvana* is not a place or a state of pleasure but a state of liberation from suffering, achieved through the cessation of attachment. Similarly, the so-called "Promised Land" is not a place that can be reached through external conquest or domination, but rather a state of mind that requires the cessation of attachment to political ideologies, territorial claims, and historical grievances.

Conclusion: Breaking the Cycle of Samsara

The exploration of the cycle of *Samsara* and the illusion of the "Promised Land" offers profound insights into the human condition. As illustrated by the tragic history of the Jewish people and their quest for a utopian society, the cycle of ignorance, attachment, and suffering is not easily broken. The Buddhist path to liberation, however, offers a solution: by recognizing the impermanence of all things and understanding the nature of desire and suffering, one can transcend the cycle of *Samsara* and achieve true peace.

In Buddhist thought, true enlightenment comes not from the external attainment of power, wealth, or territorial control, but from an internal transformation of understanding and wisdom. This requires breaking free from the illusions that bind us to a false notion of heaven on earth and recognizing that true freedom lies in the cessation of attachment to worldly desires.

Ultimately, the journey toward enlightenment involves transcending the cycles of Samsara—whether personal, social, or political—and embracing a deeper understanding of the truth. In doing so, one can break free from the perpetual cycle of suffering and move toward true liberation. Such a deep virtual and ethical pursuit can not be easily broken with the advances in technology or science as it has been clarified in the stance of Gaza which until now has massacred and disabled hundreds of thousands of sentient beings.

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