



## THE IDEA: The responses to the challenges of secularisation

As Lopez points out, one of the main attractions of Buddhism to many Western intellectuals in the 19th century was that it could be regarded as a secular philosophy. We have already seen how for them the idea of there being a recoverable original, authentic and pure Buddhism was very attractive. We have already noted how Buddhism was attractive to the well-known Victorian intellectual Thomas Huxley. The key point for him was that the original, authentic and pure Buddhism was an atheistic and secular philosophical approach to life. Turning to the 21st century, typical of popular contemporary presentations of Buddhism as a secular philosophy is the work of Noah Rasheta, the founder of SecularBuddhism.com and the Secular Buddhism podcast. In his book 'Secular Buddhism: Eastern Thought for Western Minds' he explains that for him, Buddhism is not a religion. Citing the dialogue with Malunkyaputta and Parable of the Poisoned Arrow, Rasheta argues that Buddhism is not concerned in any sense at all with 'immense, unknowable, metaphysical questions'. Instead, Buddhism is concerned with spirituality. However, both of these fall short of what he argues is most important: 'an experiential understanding of reality'. As a secular Buddhist this is what he believes Buddhism offers: freedom from conceptual belief and the possibility of an experiential understanding through understanding Buddhism as a secular philosophy.

### Quotes

- 'A system which knows no God in the western sense; which denies a soul to man; which counts the belief in immortality a blunder and the hope of it a sin... which bids men look to nothing but their own efforts for salvation.' (Thomas Huxley)
- Instead, it is a way of life: 'not something to believe in but something to notice and observe.' (Noah Rasheta, Secular Buddhism: Eastern Thought for Western Minds, Blurb, 2018)
- 'This is the kind of freedom that Buddhism can help anyone achieve. When we disconnect our emotional reactions from what happens to us, we become free to be better workers, better parents, better partners, better bosses, better human beings.' (Noah Rasheta, Secular Buddhism: Eastern Thought for Western Minds, Blurb, 2018)



## References, Further Explanations and Examples

- Such a Buddhism was felt to be not that practised in Theravada or Mahayana but was instead a secular form of Buddhism where the focus was entirely on how to live a fulfilled life in the here and now.
- To support his approach, he quotes Thich Nhat Hanh as saying: 'The secret of Buddhism is to remove all ideas, all concepts, in order for the truth to have a chance to penetrate, to reveal itself.'
- However, for him, this term has no religious overtones. Instead it means two things: making a connection and finding meaning. For Rasheta neither of these requires what might be termed religion. Religion is what he terms a shared conceptual belief which is entirely made by humans. Individual religious belief is a personal conceptual belief.