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Trends. Spinning Buddhas

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The first explanation of the Taliban for destroying Buddha statues in Afghanistan entailed the notion that the statues were idolatrous or elicited idolatrous behavior. Because idolatry is conceived as antithetical to the Good Life in an Islamic state, the statues had to be destroyed. (A previous IBPP article has advocated that the essence of this position may well be more than mere ignorance of and bias against some psychological other.)

However, the first explanation has proven less than conducive to winning international public opinion, the Taliban has surfaced another. Now it turns out that Taliban authorities were enraged that a foreign delegation offered money to preserve the largest Buddha statues while a million Afghans faced starvation. And anger led to violence. On the face of it, this explanation certainly resonates with a Western, radical chic penchant to value whales, dolphins, birds, and breath-taking vistas and wonders of the world more than valuing human life.

Yet, the latest spin on Buddha destruction appears unencumbered by an international and consensual chronological dimension of time. For example, the offer to rescue the Buddhas with money came after not before the Taliban voiced intentions of Buddha destruction--even if in the spiritual realm what comes after might affect what comes before. The latest spin also incriminates the Taliban similarly as it incriminates Western idolaters. While the idolaters may value idols before children, the Taliban (in the words of one of its envoys) values ideology and then economics before children. To both the idolaters and the Taliban, they may be the world, but they are not the children.

In fact, the Taliban authorities are idolaters and perceivers through icons as well. Whether statues or beliefs or beliefs about statues, iconic and idolatrous relations abound. Thus, engaging in Buddha destruction both kills the self and gives it life. (See Biancoli, R. (1998). The "idologic" view of transference. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 26, 15-28; Crossette, B. (March 19, 2001). Taliban explains Buddha demolition. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Freedberg, D. (1989). *The power of images: Studies in the history and theory of response*. Chicago, IL, US: The University of Chicago Press; Hull, J.M. (1999). Bargaining with God: Religious development and economic socialization. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 27, 241-249; The idolatry of ignorance and iconoclasm: Notes on the Taliban. (March 2, 2001). *IBPP*, 10(8); McWilliams, S.A. (1993). Construct no idols. *International Journal of Personal Construct Psychology*, 6, 269-280.) (Keywords: Afghanistan, Buddha Statues, Economics, Good Life, Ideology, Idolatry, Islam, Religious Intolerance, Spirituality, Taliban.)