

Christianity & World Religions
Buddhism
May 2, 2010

Several weeks ago PBS aired a 2 hour documentary about Buddhism. I know some of you watched it because you have mentioned it to me. This morning, as I continue my Christianity and World Religions sermon series, I will be talking about Buddhism. Those who saw the special can tell me if I presented the right information.

The program began with the Buddha. Who was it that began this religion? Where did he come from and what was he trying to do?

Buddhism begins with the story of a man named Siddhartha Gautama. He was born in approximately 563 BC in what is modern day Nepal. Siddhartha's father was a prince of a small kingdom. Siddhartha's mother died just after his birth. Being very protective, Siddhartha's father made sure his son was isolated from the troubles of the world. All Siddhartha knew growing up was the luxury of the palace.



Siddhartha married and had a son. Though he was happy with his life, Siddhartha was curious with life beyond the palace. Over the course of several chariot rides through the city, Siddhartha is exposed to the elderly, the sick and the dead. When he is told that is the fate of all persons, he becomes confused, anxious and depressed. To put it in psychological terms he was struggling with angst.

To help sort things out Siddhartha decides to leave his wife, child, and father. Siddhartha goes from power and wealth to being vulnerable and poor. Siddhartha pursues extreme asceticism. Those that watched the special know of the extremes he pushed his body. At one point he was eating just one grain of rice a day.

After 6 years of this life and following several teachers, he still was struggling. But then while meditating under a tree, he fell into a trance. In this trance he saw the world in a way he never did before. When Siddhartha woke up he believed he knew the source of suffering and the path to overcoming it. More than this, he let go of all things that led to suffering. Siddhartha had reached enlightenment. The Pali word for enlightenment is *Budh*. Siddhartha had become the Buddha – the Enlightened One. As we begin to look at some of the beliefs and practices of a Buddhist, it is important to remember that Siddhartha grew up surrounded by Hindu teaching. There is much overlap between the two faiths.

Like the Hindu, a Buddhist believes God is impersonal. Unlike the Hindu who prays to a god, the Buddhist has nothing to do with god. You can almost refer to a Buddhist as a non-theist. Because there is no emphasis on God, there are some that think Buddhism is not a religion but instead is a philosophy.

While the Buddha did not embrace the theology of Hinduism because he experienced no blessings from it, he did accept the Hindu view that good and bad deeds generate Karma. As we discovered last week, Karma is a force or energy that is passed on and determines the state we will occupy in the life to come.

If you remember, *samsara* is the name of the reincarnation process. One's atman goes through this reincarnation numerous times until it reaches nirvana. I will say a little more about this Nirvana is a moment.

For now I want to life up several aspects that are unique to Buddhism. As part of his revelation, the Buddha was given the four noble truths. When you understand these truths and start doing something about them, you will be on your way to nirvana.

The Four Noble Truths

1. Life is characterized by suffering. This is not meant to be a dark, depressing point of view. This is an acknowledgement that in our lives there will be times of pain, sickness and disappointment.
2. Suffering is caused by attachments. The Buddhist believes we cling to things. This clinging causes our pain. For example, we cling to life, so we

suffer when we face death. We crave to be loved, thus we suffer when love is withdrawn.

3. We can overcome our attachments. This can be done through renunciation or detachment.

4. The Holy Eightfold Path is the way to overcome suffering.

What is the 8 fold path?

1. Right views
2. Right intention
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

As you can see the 8 paths encompass most of what we do.

As like in Hinduism the first six helps one build up good karma and avoid bad karma. In the last two, we find relief from anxiety and fear by controlling our desires and thought.

One of the practices that help a Buddhist control their thought is meditation. I have a video I would like you to watch that lifts this up: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd7a9Ur2x0o>

Besides meditation yoga also plays an important role for a Buddhist.

As I mentioned last week, though yoga involves body positions, the point is not physical fitness but conditioning of the mind.

If you look at the 8 fold path, I think we could all agree those are good things to strive for. As a Christian we would do well to learn meditation. So often we can't hear God trying to speak to us because our minds are always racing. Spending time in quiet meditation might open us to that still small voice.

As for yoga, becoming aware of our bodies and moving them is a good thing. Ferndale 1st UMC, one of our South East Oakland Cooperative sister churches is now offering Christian yoga.

As you have heard, there are some major differences between Buddhism and Christianity. One has to do with the human condition. Whereas Buddhist view attachments as a bad thing, we see them as primary. Now I'm not talking about being attached to any material thing, instead I am referring to the first two commandments. Loving God with our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as our self. The point is not to detach. To goal is to build strong healthy relationships.

This relationship with God, is something a Buddhist just can't understand. We believe God desires our worship, our praise and our prayers. Through the Holy Spirit, we believe God can direct, guide, heal and comfort us. None of those things are connected with a Buddhist's understanding of God.

Finally when we die, like our dear friend Scott Goodman did last week, we believe God has prepared a place for us. Paul wrote: "that when this earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, not made with hands but eternal in the heavens."

Let me demonstrate the goal for the Buddhist. (Light candle) You suffer on earth through many reincarnations. If you reach enlightenment, if you reach nirvana, then this is what happens. (blow out candle) This non-existence is what the goal is.



How comforting it was to Scott's family to know he is with his creator and those that went on before him. It just is not the same to say his flame was blown out.

We have much to learn from our Buddhist friends. We need to be still and to live in the moment. We need to avoid attaching ourselves to all the wrong things. We certainly have much to learn about nonviolence and justice. But I think we have a lot to offer them as well: we offer hope and peace through the good news that comes from trusting in God and in the promises of Jesus Christ.

