

CULTS AND FALSE RELIGIONS

Buddhism

REVIEW:

- What are the 3 assumptions that form the JW world view? (Divine guidance comes only through the WT Society; JW's alone have the truth about God; Every other church is false and controlled by Satan.)
- What is the goal of Mormons? (To attain godhood on the basis of good works)
- What did we learn about Allah, the god of the Koran? (he is really Allah, the pagan moon god)

READING: John 14:6

INTRODUCTION: This morning we shall study an eastern religion and philosophy of life that is becoming very popular in western countries such as Australia: **Buddhism**. Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world, being exceeded in numbers only by Christianity, Islam and Hinduism; it is a religion to about 300 million people.

The word comes from “budhi”, “to awaken”. To many, Buddhism goes beyond religion and is more of a **philosophy** or “**way of life**”. The Buddhist path can be summed up as:

- (1) To lead a moral life,
- (2) To be mindful and aware of thoughts and actions, and
- (3) To develop wisdom and understanding.

I. FOUNDER:

- 1) Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), born 563 B.C. into a royal family in Lumbini (Nepal).
- 2) At the age of 29, he left his wife, children and political involvements in order to seek truth.
- 3) In 535 B.C. he attained “enlightenment” after six years of study and meditation, and assumed the title of Buddha (one who has awakened).
- 4) He promoted The Middle Way, rejecting both extremes of the mortification of the flesh and of hedonism as paths toward the state of Nirvana.
- 5) After enlightenment, the Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching the principles of Buddhism — called the Dharma, or Truth. He had many disciples and accumulated a large public following by the time of his death in his early 80's in 483 B.C.
- 6) Two and a half centuries later, a council of Buddhist monks collected his teachings (Sutras) into written form, called the Tripitaka. This included a very large collection of commentaries and traditions.
- 7) Buddha did not claim to be God; Buddhists respect Buddha, but do not worship him (so they say!).

II. HISTORY / ORGANISATION:

- 1) As Buddhism expanded across Asia, it evolved into two main forms:
 - i) Theravada Buddhism (Southern Buddhism) has been the dominant school of Buddhism in most of Southeast Asia, including Burma, Cambodia and Laos.
 - ii) Mahayana Buddhism (Northern Buddhism): China, Japan, Korea, Tibet and Mongolia.
- 2) To which might be added:
 - i) Tibetan Buddhism.
 - ii) Modern Buddhism, which started as an attempt to produce a single form of Buddhism that all Buddhists could embrace.

iii) “Zen” Buddhism, which is derived from the Japanese branch of Buddhism, and places a heavy emphasis on meditation.

III. **PURPOSE:** To eradicate suffering and attain enlightenment.

IV. **SOURCE OF AUTHORITY:**

- 1) The Tripitaka.
- 2) Traditions.
- 3) Writings of other Buddhist monks.
- 4) Personal experience.

V. **CLAIM:** Through Buddha’s teachings, one can attain true enlightenment and find contentment.

VI. **KEY LITERATURE:** The Tripitaka.

VII. **ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY:**

- 1) Bible-believing Christianity is **rejected**.
- 2) Buddhists are friendly, open to discussion, and claim to respect and tolerate Christianity. However, the exclusive teachings of Christ (I am THE way etc) are **repulsive** to them.
- 3) **Buddhists do not share most of the core beliefs of Christianity. These include:**
 - i) The age of innocence in the Garden of Eden, and the subsequent fall of man.
 - ii) Original sin shared by all mankind.
 - iii) The existence of an eternal, unchanging, personal Creator.
 - iv) The need for a personal saviour.
 - v) The virgin birth, incarnation, vicarious death and bodily resurrection of Christ.
 - vi) Salvation by grace through faith.
 - vii) Eternal existence spent in either Heaven or Hell after death.
- 4) Most Buddhists do **not** understand Biblical Christianity.

VIII. **DOCTRINAL SUMMARY:**

- 1) **GOD:** There is no supreme being.
- 2) **JESUS:** A wise teacher, perhaps enlightened, whose teachings were distorted by Christians.
- 3) **MAN:** In his true essence, man is one with Buddha.
- 4) **SALVATION:** Nirvana is achieved through:
 - i) Good works.
 - ii) Occult meditation and rituals.
 - iii) Achieving true understanding and enlightenment.
- 5) **DEATH:** One fundamental belief of Buddhism is **reincarnation**, or the **circle of life** (C.f. The Lion King). Reincarnation is the concept that “one must go through many cycles of birth, living, and death. After many such cycles, if a person releases their attachment to desire and the self, they can attain Nirvana - a state of liberation and freedom from suffering.”
- 6) **HEAVEN:** Nirvana may vaguely be compared with Heaven; A state of mind.
- 7) **HELL:** A temporary state of mind reserved for the most heinous criminals.
- 8) **THIS WORLD:** An illusion; impermanent and unreal.
- 9) **WORSHIP:**
 - i) Buddhism is more a worship of self and of knowledge than of a supreme being.
 - ii) Some forms of Buddhism teach ancestor worship (Eg. Shinto). Shrines etc.

IX. DISTINCTIVES:

- 1) **A rejection of absolutism.** “This whole world of delusion is nothing but a shadow caused by the mind...there is no world...outside the mind...To Buddha every definitive thing is illusion...things have no reality in themselves but are like heat haze.” Buddha
- 2) **A tolerance for other religions:** One destination; many paths.
- 3) **Occult influence:** Altered states of consciousness; occultist rituals; psychic powers; spiritism.
- 4) **The Three Trainings or Practices:**
 - i) **Sila:** Virtue, good conduct, morality.
 - ii) **Samadhi:** Concentration, meditation, mental development.
 - iii) **Prajna:** Discernment, insight, wisdom, enlightenment. **This is the real heart of Buddhism.**
- 5) **The Five Precepts:**
 - i) Do not kill anything living.
 - ii) Do not steal.
 - iii) Do not lie.
 - iv) Do not misuse sex.
 - v) Do not consume alcohol or other drugs.
- 6) **What is Karma?** Karma is the law that every cause has an effect, i.e., our actions have results. Karma underlines the importance of all individuals being responsible for their past and present actions.

X. TALKING WITH MEMBERS:

- 1) Buddhism rejects the idea of God so they **cannot** answer the fundamental questions of life:
 - i) Who created the universe and mankind?
 - ii) Where did I come from?
 - iii) Why am I here?
 - iv) Where am I going?
- 2) Buddhists are caught in the **endless circle of life**, with **no real hope** of escaping it. Christians have the hope of the resurrection and the assurance of everlasting life.
- 3) Christ offers an abundant life today and eternal life after death; He offers immortality in a perfect world; He offers joy, peace, and usefulness; He offers a personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe. What does Buddha offer? An arduous, lengthy road toward personal non-existence in a nebulous Nirvana!
- 4) Buddhism teaches incarnation but denies the soul, so what can reincarnate?
- 5) Who was right – Buddha or Jesus? Fulfilled prophecy and other evidence show us that the Bible is the Word of God; Buddha has no evidence for his conclusions, and Buddhists themselves are encouraged to investigate, weigh and even reject the teachings of Buddha!
- 6) Buddhism cannot address the fundamental issues of **sin, judgment, forgiveness and salvation.**
- 7) Buddha is **dead** – Jesus **rose** from the dead!

CONCLUSION:

- 1) There is ABSOLUTE truth and an EXCLUSIVE way to Heaven: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”
- 2) Let us love all Buddhists and seek to win them to Christ!

REVIEW / QUESTIONS: