

LESSON 8

BUDDHISM

Introduction

One of the great religions of the world is Buddhism. Its greatness is due to its long history and to the millions of individuals whose lives have been shaped by it. Beyond these formal followers of Buddhism are millions of other peoples and other cultures which have felt the impact and the power of Buddhism. Buddhism has been more flexible and willing to change than other religions, such as Islam and Hinduism.

Buddhism today is still changing and has more influence and more power than in previous years. People in the Western Hemisphere have rarely understood the social and political aspects of Buddhism - that is, its power and force. We have frequently held the images of a passive, docile religion which teaches men to turn away from power and to follow a gentle or passive way of life. We think of the robed monk with the alms bowl in his hand seeking food offerings from those who hope to gain merit. Today in the Buddhist countries of Asia the picture has changed. "The peaceful path of the Middle Way has been twisted into the new violence of street demonstrations with the blare of loud speakers, the hollow crack of wooden clubs on skulls and the maddening fury of tear gas. Buddhism in Asia is a faith in flames. In the new Buddhism monks march in street processions to influence legislation, end war or protest nuclear weapons. These changes can be seen frequently in many parts of the world."¹

For Christians, Buddhism is of major importance. It is important because in some countries it still presents very strong obstacles to the spread of the gospel. It is important also because Buddhism's approach to basic questions is in some ways like Christianity and in other ways in strong disagreement with Christianity.

Buddhism is the third major religion to be born in India. It began as a reformation within Hinduism. However, Buddhism is the only religion which has spread from India and has actually become a world religion. Thus Buddhism like Christianity and Islam is truly an international religion. This adds to its significance in the world today.

Buddhism is one of the first international missionary religions. We shall see that it has a missionary mandate and this explains the progressive attitude and the steady growth of the movement. Buddha himself was an active missionary, and he sought constantly to bring the good news of his teachings to other men. Two responsibilities were given by Buddha to his disciples. First, each was required to leave the world and to take monastic orders.

**Buddhism is one of the first international
religions.**

(missionary)

¹ Jerrold Schecter, *The New Face of Buddha* (New York: Coward - McCann, Inc., 1967), pp. xi-xii.

Second, each follower was commanded to go forth into the world to help people by bringing them the interpretation of life taught by the Buddha.²

Buddhism is a complex religion. Some say that it is a combination of, or a family of religions. Some people have even argued about whether or not Buddhism is a religion or if it is a philosophy or a social and political power. This study will suggest that Buddhism is all of these and more. Buddhism is an expression of Asian moral philosophy which has shaped the actions of millions of people throughout Asia. It includes mysticism, magic, ritual, forms of yoga, a detailed psychology, and other elements. In Japan it has become a major political force under the name of *Soka Gakkai*. Buddhism has found favour among the ruling classes in many Asian countries. In several countries, such as Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia it is the state religion.

Buddhism is one of the world's largest religions, but there is no accurate way of knowing how many followers it has. The number of followers has been estimated from 150 to 440 million people. Buddhism is the dominant religious faith in Hawaii today. There are more Buddhist missionaries in the state of California than there are Baptist missionaries today in Japan. There is some evidence that there is a rapidly developing form of American Buddhism. In order to appeal to people in different lands and different cultures, Buddhism has shown a willingness and an ability to change and to adapt. Buddhism will lose the look of shaved heads and robes and will become barely recognizable as an Eastern religion. In its new form it will be seen in more cities and countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Buddhism today is not what it has been at any time in the past. Certainly it is quite different from original Buddhism. One must look to the original in order to understand what has developed in the present day religion.³

Origins and Early History

The life and teachings of Buddha

Buddha is a title meaning "the enlightened one." This title was given to the founder of the religion by those who recognized his spiritual attainment and spiritual qualities. The story of Buddhism begins in the life, personality and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama who was born in the mountainous regions of Nepal, India. Because factual history was of little concern in those days, it is very difficult to separate legends from the historical fact concerning the life of the Buddha.⁴

Buddhism is _____

(complex)

Buddhism is one of the world's _____ religions.

(largest)

Buddha means "the _____ one."

(enlightened)

² Herbert Stroup, *Four Religions of Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 121.

³ Benny Lee Petty, *Buddhism: An Introduction* (An unpublished paper written at the Missionary Orientation Center, March 1979), p. 5.

⁴ E. Luther Copeland, *Christianity and World Religions* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1963), p. 45.

Buddha's father, Suddhodana, was a native prince of some standing and wealth. His mother, Maha, gave birth to the Buddha in a fertile tract called the Lubini Gardens near Nepal while on a journey. It is difficult to date Gautama's birth and death. Many scholars maintain that he was born 560 B.C. and died 480 B.C. While there is some disagreement on the exact dates, there is no serious question regarding the truth that Buddha was an actual person. In his youth, the Buddha led a life of ease and luxury. When he was sixteen years of age, according to tradition, his father built three palaces for him so that he could move from place to place during the different seasons of the year. At the age of nineteen he married Yasodhara.

In his early life Buddha was very protected by his father. The father had hoped that the Buddha would become a universal monarch, that is, emperor of all India. Because of this he encouraged his son to live within the palace walls, shielded from the evils of life. But the young prince did not obey. One day, driving out of the palace with his charioteer, he came upon a decrepit old man. This experience stimulated Buddha's interest in old age. On another trip he saw a man who was badly diseased. From this experience he learned the misery which is known by many with physical afflictions. On a third day the prince saw a dead man being carried in a funeral procession. This was his first encounter with death and caused the young Buddha to become aware of the brevity of man's existence. These three experiences had a deep and powerful effect on Buddha. He realized that he also was a man bound to all the evils which he had observed.⁵

As a result of these experiences and a new concern, the Buddha resolved to renounce his privileged life and seek the answer to the problems of life. According to tradition, he bid farewell to his sleeping wife and son. Gautama was thirty years of age when he began this search. He put away his princely clothes and jewels and shaved his hair. He began to wear the yellow robe of a holy man. In his search, Buddha tried asceticism and self denial. This quest for truth and salvation continued for six years. While meditating under a tree Buddha fell into a trance-like meditation. It was under this tree which was later known as the Tree of Knowledge that Buddha found the answer to the problems of life. *Desire, said Buddha, was the root cause of all human suffering.* In this moment of enlightenment, Buddha suddenly realized that he had achieved salvation. In the Buddhist idea, he had secured *nirvana*. *Nirvana is the state of enlightenment and is the ultimate goal for the Buddhist.* For one who reaches *nirvana* all desire and craving for things is gone. One who has overcome his cravings and desires and has reached this state of *nirvana* is known as

Is the following statement true or false?
Buddha was born a wealthy prince.

(true)

List three encounters that changed the young prince's life.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Buddha gained enlightenment while _____. He said the root cause of all human suffering was _____.

(meditating, desire)

The state of enlightenment and the ultimate goal of Buddhists is _____.

(nirvana)

⁵ Amanda Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (New York: University Books, 1969), p. 10.

an *Arahat*. From this moment on Gautama was no longer Siddhartha Gautama, but he was now the Buddha or the Enlightened One.

After seven days, Buddha was confronted by *Mara*, the evil one. His temptation was: whether to keep his new-found ecstasy to himself or to communicate it to the whole world. He had given up all to find salvation. He was a Buddha for his own sake. However in this crucial test Buddha decided that he must be a Buddha for all people.

Gautama left the forest and brought his new discovery to the cities. He spent the rest of his life teaching many people. For forty-five years he was a wandering monk and religious reformer. A new faith and a new way of life came to India.

Early changes and developments

Buddha had continued to be a Hindu throughout his life. In the sixth century before Christ, Hinduism and India needed reformation. Gautama Buddha had gathered disciples and began to protest the ritualism and the caste distinctions of Hinduism. He thought much about self-enlightenment. After his death at about eighty, his followers began to worship him as an exalted person rather than as a teacher. He became the symbol of compassion. Throughout history, Buddhists have disagreed on the degree of veneration which should be given to Buddha. One group accepts and teaches about the human Buddha, who called in his dying words for his disciples to be self-reliant and not to be dependent upon any divine being. Another group, however, has developed doctrines which assert that the Buddha is indeed the divine saviour of the whole world. By these followers, Buddha has been idolized. *In fact, there are more images of the Buddha in the world than of any other divinity.* Perhaps this was the first serious change which took place in the early years of the new religion.

Soon after Gautama's death his disciples summarized their beliefs in the three refuges. Buddhists declare their faith and love by repeating these words:

"I take my refuge in the Buddha."

"I take my refuge in the Dharma."

"I take my refuge in the Sangha."

The *Buddha* means "the Enlightened One." The *Dharma* means the teaching of Buddha. The *Sangha* means the order of monks. In order for a monk to be a true follower of Buddha he must make these statements of faith and commitment. In addition, there were "Ten Precepts" that each monk must accept. Following are the ten guidelines or precepts for living a life which leads to *nirvana*:

1. Thou shall not kill any living being;
2. Thou shall not take what is not thine;
3. Thou shall not commit adultery;
4. Thou shall not prevaricate, but shall speak the word of truth;
5. Thou shall not partake of any intoxicating liquors;

Is the following statement true or false?

After receiving his "enlightenment," Buddha was satisfied and became a recluse - relishing in his salvation and entrance into nirvana. _____

(false)

Buddha became an object of _____ after his _____.

(worship, death)

There are more images of _____ in the world than of any other _____.

(Buddha, divinity)

6. Thou shall not partake of food after mid-day;
7. Thou shall not be present at any dramatic, dancing, or musical performance;
8. Thou shall not use any personal adornment or perfumes;
9. Thou shall not sleep on a broad, comfortable bed;
10. Thou shall not be owner of any gold or silver.

These ten precepts led to doctrinal debates among Buddhists. These debates created a division within Buddhism.

The Two Streams of Buddhism

According to tradition, a hundred years after the Buddha's death there was a council at Vesali. The purpose was to debate points of doctrine. The main point of the debate was concerned with the severity or the harshness of these early Buddhist doctrines. As a result, a division developed within Buddhism. The two major divisions within Buddhism are: *Theravada* and *Mahayana*. Although there are other divisions within Buddhism, these are generally recognized as the two major branches or streams of Buddhism. *Theravada* is the strictest branch within Buddhism. It requires compliance to all ten precepts. Those who belong to this group are the monks and the elders. This strict and conservative group is also known as *Hinayana*. This term means the smaller raft. The meaning is that because of the very strict requirements fewer people are able to reach *nirvana* through this form of Buddhism.

The *Mahayana* is the branch of Buddhism which includes lay people and not just the monks. People who belong to *Mahayana* were allowed to remain in their other occupations. Another main difference is that they are only required to hold strictly to the first five precepts. In contrast to the stricter group of Buddhists, the *Mahayana* also allows more room for worldly enjoyment. This is the form of Buddhism which has more popular appeal or is designed for the masses and not just the few.

It was mentioned earlier that one who reaches the state of *nirvana* is called an *Arahat*. These belong to the strict group—the *Hinayana*. By contrast the *Mahayana* branch teaches that the goal for a Buddhist is to become a *Bodhisattva*. They teach that there are many such holy people and not just a few. These are holy people who are near the state of *nirvana*. However, the *Bodhisattvas* have vowed not to enter *nirvana* until the whole human race has achieved salvation. Thus we discover that there are two streams within Buddhism. They have two different sets of requirements as well as two different goals for this life. For the strict group the goal is complete enlightenment and *nirvana*. For the more popular and liberal group the goal is to be involved with others and to exemplify compassion in their life. There is more concern for other people within the *Mahayana* branch of Buddhism.

Name the two major divisions within Buddhism.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Who are the *Hinayana*?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Is the following true or false?

The *Mahayana* branch of Buddhism is most popular. It has a larger following than the *Theravada*.

(true)

Name the branch of Buddhism that has the most concern for other people.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The Sacred Books

Basic Buddhist teachings are found in the *Tripataka*. *Tripataka* means "the three baskets of wisdom." They are a collection of the sacred writings and they are divided into three different books which contain the teachings of Buddha. The *Pitaka* are composed of the three following divisions.

1. The *Sutra Pitaka* contains the messages, lessons and sermons given by Buddha himself. It is this volume that contains the truth about salvation for the laity.
2. The *Vinaya Pitaka* contains the moral standards for Buddhist monks. There are 227 strict rules to be observed.
3. The *Abhidharma Pitaka* contains the metaphysics and the philosophy of Buddhism. Some of these later writings contain rather advanced psychological insight and instruction.

The *Tripataka* is a voluminous collection of Chinese texts numbering 13,520 "scrolls." In one hundred bound volumes of one thousand pages each, these also include general catalogues which help the reader to find the desired material. The Buddhist scriptures also include *Shastras* which are more systematic writings by later authors.

It should be noted that the Hinayana Buddhists (the stricter branch) are the ones who make more serious use of these extensive sacred writings.

The Buddhist scriptures added an element of love and compassion. This was not found in Hinduism and is a major change in the new religion of Buddha. However, Christians will note that the Buddhist concept of compassion (known as *metta*) falls short of the concept of Godly love as taught by Christ and Paul. Buddhism has most often stopped with merely "feeling" for a neighbour in distress and failing to help in a concrete way. For this reason, it is quite different from the Christian ethic of all-giving love. However, the new aggressive *Soka Gakkai* branch of Buddhism has developed a sense of personal concern and social action. This is clearly seen in Japan and is increasingly so in the Western Hemisphere.

Central Teachings

It has already been noted that there are two main divisions within the Buddhist religion. The Hinayana Buddhists are described as the group who are "riding in a small vessel or a small chariot." They said that because their chariot was small only a few could travel with them. This means that because of the strictness, they believe that only a few could reach nirvana by their form of Buddhism. The Hinayana Buddhists who remain in Southern Asia are sometimes referred to as Southern Buddhists. The Mahayana are those in the "big chariot" or the more liberal and the more popular group. But the fine points of doctrine are many, and it is neither necessary nor possible to deal with the separate teach-

The sacred writings of Buddhism are divided into _____ different _____.

(three, books.)

One of these divisions is the _____.

(Pitaka)

A voluminous collection of Chinese texts numbering 13,520 "scrolls" is known as the _____.

(Tripataka)

Writings by later authors are called the _____.

(Shastras)

A major change in the religion of Buddha was the addition of _____ and _____.

(love, compassion)

ings of these two groups. For the purpose of this study the following teachings are those that are either common to both branches of Buddhism or they are the teachings primarily of the Mahayana group. This is done because outside of certain parts of Asia, the Buddhist message and practice will be that of the Mahayana. The Mahayana are also known as the Northern Buddhists. It should be remembered that Mahayana Buddhism as it developed did not completely break with the more strict form of Buddhism.

Karma

It must be remembered that Buddhism grew out of Hinduism and has retained many of the presuppositions of that religion. In fact, it may be said that Buddhism is an attempt to answer many of the questions raised in Hinduism. According to Hinduism, man is involved in an endless wheel of births and rebirths. This process is referred to as "reincarnation." To the Hindu this particular process is known as *Samara*. This belief is found in Buddhism as well as in Hinduism. The most important teaching related to rebirth is known as *Karma*.

Karma is the manifestation of the moral law of cause and effect which states that man must reap what he sows. The doctrine of *Karma* teaches that every action in a moment of time is directly influenced by every other action from the past. According to the law of *Karma*, whatever a man is now in this life is determined primarily by what he thought, what he said and what he did in other previous lives. It also follows that whatever man thinks and does in this life will determine his quality of life in his next existence, or in his next incarnation.

Although Buddhism held onto the idea of *Karma*, it is different from the Hindu concept of *Karma*. The difference is that for a Buddhist, enlightenment would bring forth liberation and thus alter or weaken the cause or effect of *Karma*. Thus, the power of *Karma* for the Buddhist is somewhat altered or limited. In Buddhism the present is not determined entirely by past actions, but it can be altered at any point by the experience of enlightenment on the part of the individual. As a believer practises the law of the good *Karma* he is able to direct his own future as well as that of others. By so doing he helps himself and others to obtain the universal goal of *nirvana* (the extinction of self.)⁶ When one comes to the state of enlightenment, he is able to realize that nothing in life is permanent. Suffering and pain are the result of man and his ignorance. Man's mistake is largely because of setting his desires on things that are impermanent, or things that are not of true value. Thus there is a strong connection between ignorance and how it leads to suffering. But the answer is not through learning or education; it is through enlightenment. In this experience

Buddhism grew out of _____.

(Hinduism)

The manifestation of the moral law of cause and effect is known as _____.

(Karma)

The Buddhist idea of Karma is _____.

(different)

In Buddhism, Karma can be altered at any point by the experience of _____.

(enlightenment)

⁶ Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism* (Shanghai, China, Commercial Press Ltd., 1934), p. 11.

of enlightenment the Buddha discovered the wisdom of a "Middle Path." The middle path for living and making decisions is the path between self-indulgence on one extreme and extreme self-denial on the other extreme. Thus the Buddhist idea of the "Middle Path" is related to *Karma* and the experience of enlightenment.

When Buddha had his experience of enlightenment he received certain specific and important forms of understanding. They are called the "Four Noble Truths."

The Four Noble Truths

Buddha discovered that man cannot find happiness or enlightenment until he has truly learned the four noble truths. These are seen as the key to understanding life and understanding these truths prepares one to travel life successfully. These truths lead to the Buddhist teaching of the way of life. This is described as the eight-fold path.

The teachings of Buddhism regarding the person begin with the Buddha's sermon which he preached at Benars to his first five disciples. On that occasion he gave his hearers and the world the "four noble truths."

1. The first noble truth is that *suffering is a universal fact of all life*. Buddha declared that birth, decay, illness and death are suffering. The presence of hated objects also causes suffering. Suffering is caused when a person is separated from objects he loves. For one not to obtain what is desired is also suffering.

2. The second noble truth is that *desire is the cause of suffering*. Buddha declared that suffering is caused by a three-fold desire or thirst: the thirst for pleasure, the thirst for existence, and the thirst for prosperity. These desires must be recognized as the causes of suffering, according to Buddha.

3. The third noble truth is *suffering is removed when desire is forsaken or overcome*. Thus man must free himself from all desires if he would be free from suffering. Every desire, every passion and every ambition must be destroyed.

4. The fourth and final noble truth *leads to the path of enlightenment*, or to the noble path.

The Noble Eight-Fold Path

All Buddhists are taught the importance of the following eight steps or requirements to travel the noble path to enlightenment and *nirvana*. Peter Chen organizes the eight-fold path as follows:

Knowledge

1. *The Right view or the Right Understanding*. This refers to the understanding of self and to the understanding of Buddha's *Dharma*.

2. *Right Attitude of Mind. Right Aspiration or High and Noble Aims*. This attitude signifies the need for proper love of others, the willingness to harm no living thing and

The "Middle Path" is that path that lies between _____ and _____

(self, indulgence, self, denial)

What are Buddha's four noble truths?

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Write a brief definition beside each of the following.
Right Understanding: _____

Right Attitude of Mind: _____

to possess and display a constructive attitude towards life.

Ethical actions

3. *Right Speech which consists of kind words.* This means that the language of the believer is courteous, considerate and truth. Even silence can be right speech.

4. *Right Conduct or Right Behaviour.* Right action means that all action, whether positive or negative is meaningful. In Buddhism there are five negative precepts which are taught. The believer is required to abstain from killing, stealing, sensuality, lying and from the use of intoxicating liquors or drugs. While one is to avoid these wrong actions, it must be remembered that he is commanded to practise positive action. This is required and is beneficial to all Buddhists.

5. *Right Livelihood consisting of an honest vocational life.* The believer is required to follow a trade or an occupation which is in harmony with the eight-fold path.

Mental disciplines

6. *Right Effort, which is perseverance in goodness.* Primarily, this means that the Buddhist cannot be careless or apathetic about his attainment of *nirvana*. This step focuses on priorities and right motivation. *The Buddhist believer must depend upon his own constant efforts.* (*Nirvana* is not a collective state; it can only be won by individuals.)

7. *Right Mindfulness, or the right use of the intellect.* This includes the challenge to prevent new evil from entering one's mind and to remove all evil that is there. It also means that one must develop the good that is in one's mind, and seek to acquire still more good. This control is developed through the art of concentration.

8. *Right Meditation.* Primarily, this means meditation on the Buddha and the *Dharma* (Buddha's laws and teachings).⁷ Right meditation signifies the last phase of the believer's struggle to secure *nirvana*. In this stage the individual is barely separated from *nirvana*. At this point he is free from desires, suffering and rebirth...Saintly Buddhists, on the threshold of *nirvana*.⁸

When combined, the truths and the eight-fold path provide a pattern for spiritual progress for the Buddhist. These basic teachings are like the rungs of the ladder, whereby the individual may go from one stage to another stage until he reaches the *highest goal*. The development of the believer by the way of the four noble truths and the eight-fold paths is characterized in Buddhist law as consisting of three stages. First, the believer is to refrain from all evil. Second, he is to do what is good. Third, he is to purify his mind.

Right Speech: _____

Right Conduct: _____

Right Livelihood: _____

Right Effort: _____

Right Mindfulness: _____

Right Meditation: _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

⁷ Peter Chen, *Brief Introduction to Buddhism and Christian Witness* (A pamphlet published by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, August 1978), p. 2.

⁸ Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The Eightfold Path to Nirvana," *Great Religions of the World* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1971), pp. 89-95.

Buddhist Ideas of God

In our study we have described Buddhism as a religion — as one of the larger and more significant religions in the world. However, some scholars have stated that the basic teachings of Buddha actually represent more of a philosophy than a religion. Other writers have even suggested that Buddhism teaches atheism. To hear such questions or suggestions is surprising. Upon closer look, one can see why these questions are raised concerning Buddhism as a religion and what it actually teaches concerning God.

Part of the debate about the Buddhist concept of God has to do with one's definition of God. It is true that in his personal teachings and writings Buddha denies the existence of a creator or any being who stands outside of man and outside of the world. He did not conceive of such a divine being who stands in judgement of man and his actions. There was no need in Buddha's system for gods. Salvation was strictly the practice of laws of *Karma*. This law is the Buddhist concept of judgement and accountability. This law carries the impersonal principle that a person's deliberate actions produce mental and physical results in keeping with their original quality.

It is true that the Buddhist concept of God is impersonal and rather vague. Certainly there is more vagueness and less focus on God than in other world religions. However, it is important to note that in his later works the Buddha did speak of gods, although they have no power to aid man towards salvation. It follows that if there are no gods who are able to break into the course of history on man's behalf then there is also no place for prayer. The Buddhist does not pray to God as do Christians or Jews. Gautama the Buddha has described the futility of prayer in this way: "Could the farther bank of the river Akirvati come over to this side, no matter how much a man prayed it to do so?" In a similar way the Buddhist has no need for priests. This is because there are no gods to be worshipped or appeased through ritual or sacrifice. Instead of priests, Buddhism depends heavily upon the teaching and leadership of the monks who are the "clergical group." Primarily, they are seen as holy men and as teachers.

It does appear that some Buddhists have incorporated changes which give more attention to God, or to a certain concept of God. The Buddhist churches of America give allegiance to Amida Buddha, who has reached Buddhahood along with Gautama. His name is held to have the four aspects of full compassion, perfect virtue, ultimate value and absolute power. These are qualities attributed to God by Christians and Jews. Therefore, it is true that Buddhism presents an impersonal and weak concept of God, but this seems to be an aspect of their teaching which is still being formulated or altered.

In his personal teachings and writings, Buddha denies the existence of a _____.

(creator)

The Buddhist concept of God is _____.

(impersonal)

Concept of Man

A very unique teaching of Buddhism concerns the concept of man and personhood. *Anatta* is one of the most distinct and important ideas in Buddhism. *Anatta* means "no self" and "no soul." Buddhism stresses the idea of the *non-ego*. This doctrine signifies that the individual ego (concept of personal identity and personhood) is a delusion. So there is no idea of a permanent or unchangeable person. For the Buddhist, a person can be really happy only after he as an individual no longer exists. The reaching of *nirvana* is accomplished by the removal of desires, as has already been mentioned. More importantly, this includes another related teaching. *The Buddhist follower must come to see himself as not having ultimate or lasting value. This is the idea of the non-ego.* The focus is away from a strong or important sense of identity or individual worth. The individual, according to Buddhist thought is composed of five factors: physical form, feeling, awareness, mental formations and consciousness. Man is conceived only as a combination of these factors. In Buddhism there is no mention of a soul as a separate or lasting entity. There is no suggestion of the resurrection of the body in any form. At death, the whole structure of a person simply dissolves.

Buddhism stresses the idea of
(non, ego)

Buddhism Today: A Brief Summary

Buddhism, we have noted, is the outgrowth of efforts to grapple with basic problems of human existence. Why are our lives filled with so much evil and suffering? How can we escape evil and suffering on a personal level? Buddhism started with basic assumptions which were accepted from the Hinduism of its day. The belief in a constant series of birth and rebirths remains important to all Buddhists. It is the law of *Karma* that determines one's role in the world and quality of life. In each new incarnation the Buddhist believes that he can modify or alter the strong law of *Karma* for good or for evil. Life is viewed as unimportant, and almost as not worth living. Salvation consists in breaking the sequence of death and rebirth. Gautama, the Buddha, the Enlightened, believed that he had done this. It was his discovery and his achievement which he sought to share with the world.

This way of salvation which developed in North India six centuries before Christ spread rapidly. Its extension was mostly southward and eastward. Among some peoples, it became the dominant or the only religion. In other areas, such as China, it became one of many other religions.

Buddhism continues to reflect modification and change. This is particularly true in Asia and in America. The young Asian frequently finds himself in conflict. The conflict is between his intellectual and educational growth which comes largely from the West and his need to identify himself and see himself as an Asian. Thus, he

returns to his native culture and his native religion which is Buddhism. Many young Asians feel that religion is not merely a spiritual force, but it is also a means to action - especially social and political action. These are some of the factors that keep Buddhism deeply entrenched in the lives of many. These factors also make it necessary for Buddhism to have room for modernization and for some change.

In the course of its long history Buddhism has developed certain religious ideas and values which are found in the Christian faith. There are also many strong and important differences between these two ways of life.

Buddhism and Christianity

The Buddhist message has points of similarity and points of strong differences when compared to the teachings of Christ. There are both similarities and strong differences regarding the understanding of sin and evil. Buddhism has taken a serious look at the fact and reality of sin. Buddhism has recognized the heart of man as the primary cause of sin. It diagnosed the fundamental instincts and desire of men: personal ambition, sex appetite, the will to achieve power, etc. All of these must be overcome and removed completely. Buddhism regards any such desire and any such striving as a wrong which must be eliminated completely. Christianity acknowledges that excessive desire and desire that is unguided and totally selfish can lead to great evil and suffering. The message of Christianity, however, recognizes the power for good in man's desires and ambition. Therefore, the Christian message seeks to control and sublimate these desires to serve the individual and society. The gospel of Christ teaches that God's Spirit and God's Word should determine these desires and set the priorities of man's life. This attitude of the two religions towards the instincts of evil is therefore fundamentally different.

Traditional Buddhism has sought to destroy or to dissolve man's personality. Later Buddhism has somewhat modified this approach and put strong appeal on the desire for the individual to enter a heaven which is merely a replica of the earth. Christianity starts with a personal God and holds before the believer the goal of perfection for his own personality. Each individual has great worth and integrity according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Christian message comes to each man in his problems and limitations and bestows on him true selfhood and great worth and great potential.

Early Buddhism taught that salvation is accomplished entirely by the individual. Later Buddhism has recognized man's helplessness and made some limited room for assistance which might come from the divine. But the kind of assistance and the concept of God continued to be weak and ambivalent. There is simply some suggestion that man needs divine help. By con-

The message of Christianity recognizes the power for _____ in man's _____ and _____.

(good, desires, ambitions)

Buddhism has sought to dissolve man's _____.

(personality)

Christianity starts with a _____ God. It holds before the believer the goal of _____ for his own _____.

(personal, perfection, personality)

trast, Christianity asserts that salvation is possible only through God's intervention. The Incarnation, the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus and His work in the world through the Holy Spirit are the expressions of God's loving concern for man. He has done in Christ that which man alone could not accomplish. He has made possible reconciliation and forgiveness and newness of life.

Other comparisons could be made between the two religions. Serious students can recognize other similarities and other sharp differences. Every true disciple of Christ has found the strength and fellowship of the Christian family or the Christian community. The Buddhist does not know this in his own life. For the Buddhist, religious faith and practice is very private and does not involve a community or a congregation. This is another outstanding difference and a strong appeal when the gospel of Christ is presented to those who follow Buddha and his teachings.

A Christian Approach to Followers of Buddha

The Christian who understands the tradition and teachings of Buddhism has strong encouragement to share his faith and to introduce Jesus Christ. The Christian makes his witness to a Buddhist realizing that this great religion has been reaching out for the light which shines brightly in our Christian religion. Christians who make this witness have the assurance that they have a message which brings fulfilment to the ideas and promises of contemporary Buddhism and that the way has been prepared for these people to receive the highest message - the message of God's eternal and personal love directed to all mankind.

Each Christian will discover certain approaches which God will richly bless as the believer gives a faithful witness. The following are a few suggestions which should be considered when one is seeking to introduce a Buddhist to Jesus Christ and to life abundant which He provides.

1. For any person who decides to be an effective witness to any adherent of another faith there is one essential requirement. The Christian who shares his faith must have a true and dynamic personal relationship with Christ. The ultimate question is: "What has Jesus meant in my life?" When the Christian is convinced that Christ is as real as his own breath and is nearer than his closest friend, he is then ready to speak to other people about a personal relationship with Jesus.

2. Friendship is perhaps the best avenue to take in witnessing to Buddhists. If one is merely critical and judgemental of the beliefs of Buddhists there will be little openness to what is said. The Buddhist friend or neighbour should be treated as a person of great value and not just as a "prospect." True love and friendship will

Christianity asserts that salvation is possible only through God's _____.

(intervention)

Buddhism does not involve a _____ or a _____.

(community, congregation)

Is the following statement true or false?
When a Christian witness talks with a Buddhist, he knows he is talking to someone whose religion (Buddhism) has been reaching out for the light that shines brightly in the Christian faith. _____

(true)

The Christian who shares his faith must have a true and dynamic _____ relationship with Jesus Christ.

(personal)

Perhaps the best avenue to take in witnessing to Buddhists is _____.

(friendship)

win this person's confidence and respect; and this will open the door for a more verbal and direct form of witness.

3. While it is important to know something of the values, the goals and teachings of Buddhism, it is even more important to know what an individual Buddhist really believes and really thinks. This means that the effective Christian witness will find opportunity to talk about spiritual matters with the Buddhist friend. In this way the gospel of Christ can be directed towards the spiritual condition and the personal needs of this individual. This is necessary in order to relate to the individual and to know what this person really believes and what this person really needs in his or her life. Often there is a difference between the official teachings of a religion and what the average follower truly believes and understands. Make your Christian witness the outcome of a sharing relationship.

4. In this sharing relationship, share in a simple way the personal relationship you have with Jesus Christ. Share the joy you have in knowing the personal Lord and what He has done in your life. When this testimony is given with honesty and simplicity, it becomes a powerful instrument of the Holy Spirit.

5. Share the teaching and the truth that suffering is inevitable. This is a part of life for all people, but in Christ we have peace and joy. Use the appropriate Scriptures which make this truth clear.

6. Remember that the Buddhist is engaged in a life long search "to be good." The Christian witness declares that it is in relationship with Jesus Christ that we are made righteous before God. It is quite important to use the Scriptures to present salvation as a work of God's love and God's power which become active and effective in the individual.

7. Remember that the Buddhist places the focus on the man and not on God. Christians can affirm much of what the Buddhist knows of man. But they can do so much more. They can tell him of God and what God's Word teaches about man—especially what God teaches about man's salvation. Buddha teaches that God and His existence is unimportant. The Bible declares God's greatness and sovereignty. All men believe this in their heart.

8. Remember that effective witnessing does not mean religious debate and arguing. It is important to show love and true respect for another person and for his or her beliefs.

9. God's Spirit convinces of truth and of righteousness. The Christian witness is made strong through a love

Is the following statement true or false?

The Christian witness needs to be the outcome of a sharing relationship. _____

(true)

Share your personal relationship with Jesus Christ in a _____ way.

(simple)

Share the truth that suffering is _____.

(inevitable)

Explain we are made righteous through our relationship with _____.

(Jesus, Christ)

Remember that the Buddhist places the focus on _____ not _____.

(men, God)

Effective witnessing does not mean religious _____ and _____.

(debate, arguing)

People are convinced of truth and righteousness by God's _____.

(Spirit)

which is active and a life which is sincerely following Christ. Live a life that reflects the goodness which comes as a result of God's presence and God's Spirit. Keep in mind that the Buddhist does not recognize or realize that anyone can love him because everyone is under the heavy burden of suffering. Such love becomes a convincing and compelling argument to the person who is still seeking eternal truth and purpose for life.

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity *Levels 1, 2, and 3*). After reading the study guide, answer the following questions.

1. What was the turning point in Buddha's life?

2. What was Buddha's enlightenment?

3. What is Nirvana? How does one achieve it?

4. What did Buddha do with his new enlightenment?

5. Name one major change in Buddhism that took place not long after Buddha's death.

6. Name and distinguish between the major divisions of Buddhism.

7. List the three different sacred books of Buddhism.

8. How is Karma different to the Buddhist?

9. What is meant by the "Middle Path"?

10. List the "four noble truths" of Buddhism.

11. What is the "noble eight-fold path"?

12. What is the Buddhist concept of God?

13. What is the Buddhist idea of "non-ego"?

14. Compare Buddhism with Christianity.

15. Why should Christians attempt a witness to Buddhists?

16. What does the author mean by this statement: "Make your Christian witness the outcome of a sharing relationship." (See p. 106.)

Supplementary activity *Levels 2 and 3*). Read pages 13-15; 30-32; 52-56; 82-89; 120-26; 147-49; 195-98 in *Understanding World Religions*. Do the following things.

1. Write the story of the life of Buddha.
2. What Hindu concepts did Buddha reject? Accept?
3. List the differences between Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism.
4. According to the author of the supplementary text, what is the main emphasis of Buddhism?
5. How does the Buddhist achieve enlightenment?

Advanced activity (*Level 3*). Review the readings given above. Do the following things.

1. Explain the two schools of Buddhism: The Hinayana and the Mahayana.
2. Write a paper entitled: "The Four Noble Truths."
3. How would you witness to a Hinayana Buddhist and to a Mahayana Buddhist?

Seminar Discussion

1. How does Buddhism deal with the problem of suffering? Does this really solve the problem? Why or why not? How does the Christian deal with this problem?
2. Discuss how a Buddhist conceives of salvation, the soul and heaven.
3. How would you witness to a Buddhist?