

Christians Confronting Cultural Issues Session 5: Buddhism

The Old New Age

- Buddhism is the most culturally popular belief system in the West, assimilating many in universities and Hollywood. Buddhism in the United States has grown 2.000% since the 1970s.
- An estimated 350 million people worldwide are Buddhists.
- Buddhism is the foundation for most New Age mystics.

This week's Goal:

- state basic Buddhists beliefs
- give a biblical response to each belief
- suggest ways to witness to Buddhists

Acts 19:22-41

Witnessing Tip-Explain That God Is Always Near

Buddhists reject the idea of a personal God. Because they believe in and fear spirits, they burn incense or offer food at home altars for protection. Share with them that God is a personal God who is always near, always around us, and always in us (see James 4:8). Explain that God gives His followers real peace (see Phil. 4:7).

Definition:

Pantheism is the belief that everything is God or a part of God.

Differences Between Hinduism and Buddhism

Hindus	Buddhists
Believe in millions of gods	Believe in no god or gods
Are likely to have small statues in home	Have no idols except maybe a Buddha
See a God force in everything	View humans as the only center
Are more likely to attract environmental activists due to belief in pantheism	Are more likely to attract intellectuals and philosophers

Witnessing Tip-Proclaim Christ's Victory over Suffering

Buddhists are occupied with overcoming suffering. Help them understand that as serious as the problem of suffering is, the basic problem in life is sin against a holy God (See Rom. 3:23, 1 John 1:8, 3:1-9). Christ faced suffering on the cross and overcame it (See John 16:33). By trusting Jesus Christ, people can gain forgiveness of their sin, be victorious in suffering in this life, and have definite hope and assurance of a future life without suffering.

Mahayana Buddhism: The Greater Vehicle Progressives

When Buddhism splintered into two groups, the Mahayana, the progressive Buddhists, were the largest group and became known as the Greater Vehicle (Mahayana).

Vajrayanan Buddhism: The Dalai Lama

Vajrayanan, or Tantric, Buddhism has become popular in the West due to its emphasis on finding power and control through techniques and rituals.

Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism: Japanese Reformed Buddhism

Around A.D. 1253 a Japanese Buddhist named Nichiren Daishonin, believing he was the second Buddha, declared all Buddhist sects corrupt.

Zen Buddhism: Meditative Buddhism

The most interesting form of Buddhism and the most recognizable in the West is Zen Buddhism. The Movement is interesting not only because of what it teaches but also for what it does not teach. Zen Buddhism has no sacred books, no central doctrines, and no organization to speak of. It is pure, unadulterated mysticism and existentialism, based entirely on meditation and mystical experience.

Witnessing Tip-Make It Clear

When witnessing to Buddhists, avoid terms like *new birth*, *rebirth*, and *born again* because they will misunderstand you. Instead, use *endless freedom from guilt and sin*, *new power for living a holy life*, *promise of eternal life without suffering*, and *gift of unlimited merit*.

Culture Clash-Attracting Followers

Buddhism's view of eternity attracts many social activists and New Age followers.

- Buddhists regard fighting social injustice as a sacred act.
- Because peace is found through meditation, Buddhists place great value on working for peace in society.
- Ultimately, Buddhism is not interested in eternity, instead preferring to invest its energy in peace activism and social causes.
- The Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation lends itself to these New Age teachings, past-life regression, spirit teachers, and energy focus (shakra).
- The Buddhist focus on internal energy forces offers New Age teachers opportunities to seek a higher state of consciousness through such practices as crystals, divining rods, and spiritual massages.

The Eightfold Path can be divided into three major categories:

Salvation by Wisdom: Panna

Step 1: right understanding

Step 2: right thought

Salvation by Good Works: Sila

Step 3: right speech

Step 4: right action

Step 5: right livelihood

Salvation by Mental Discipline: Samadhi

Step 6: right effort

Step 7: right mindfulness (awareness)

Step 8: right concentration (meditation)

Witnessing Tip-Make a Difference

Use commonalities with Buddhists to build a bridge for witness. Buddhists are to be commended for their work for social justice, but be careful to explain to the Buddhist that these actions do not earn salvation. Christians believe in fighting for the rights of the downtrodden, but this is a result of our salvation, not a means of earning it. Jesus taught His followers to have compassion for the poor and to minister to their needs, but He came to bring eternal spiritual redemption to people, not solely to meet physical needs on earth.

Witnessing Tip-Share Your Testimony

Buddhists emphasize personal experience rather than doctrine. Share your personal testimony, emphasizing the change Christ has brought in you life. State what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus, being sure to point out your freedom from guilt and assurance of heaven. Explain that only a relationship with Christ makes a person righteous before God. This is good news to a Buddhist who is struggling to break the cycles of karma and reincarnation.

- 1. Buddhists reject the concept of grace.**
- 2. Buddhists see Jesus' death as a violation of karma.**
- 3. Buddhists reject the concept of personal worth.**

A Comparison of Beliefs

	Christianity	Buddhism
God	God is real and personal.	No God exists.
Humans	Each person, of infinite worth, is created in God's image.	We are a collection of one force and are insignificant as individuals.
Sin	We suffer because we are born sinners. Sin is directly against a righteous God and alienates us from Him.	We suffer because of desire.
Salvation	Ultimate hope is forgiveness by God and reconciliation through Christ's shed blood.	Ultimate hope is to reach nonexistence, which is nirvana.
The Means of Salvation	Salvation comes only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We do nothing to earn His love or salvation.	Enlightenment through the knowledge of the four Noble Truths on the Eightfold Path.
Eternity	We will live eternally with the triune God in heaven.	Nirvana is the end of reincarnation and of existence.