

# The and transfer of merit for the



The most devoted followers of the Buddha were organized into a sangha. Its members were identified by their shaved heads and robes made of unsewn orange cloth. The early Buddhist monks, or bhikkus, wandered from place to place, settling down in communities only during the rainy season when travel was difficult. Theravada monks and nuns were humble and obtained their food in the form of offering on a daily round of the homes of lay devotees. Among the traditional functions of the Buddhist monks are the performance of funerals and memorial services in honor of the dead.

Major elements of such services include the chanting of scripture and transfer of merit for the benefit of the deceased. (1, 3) Lay worship in Buddhism is primarily done individual rather than congregational. Although technically the Buddha is not worshipped through Theravada, worship is done through the stupa. A stupa is a dome-like structure containing a relic.

Devotees walk around the dome in a clockwise direction, carrying flowers and incense as a sign of respect. The relic is the Buddha's tooth in Sri Lanka.

It is the focus of a popular festival on the Buddha's birthday. The Buddha's birthday is celebrated in every Buddhist country. In Theravada this celebration is known as Vaisakha, the month after the Buddha was born.

Popular in Theravada cultures is a ceremony known as pirit, or protection, in which readings from a collection of protective charms from the Pali canon are conducted to exorcise evil spirits, cure illness, bless new buildings, and achieve other benefits. This was a popular practice that practitioners of Buddhism, monks, did to help them reach Nirvana. (1, 3, 4, 5) In Mahayana cultures, ritual is more important than in Theravada cultures.

Images of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas on temple altars and in the homes of devotees serve as a focus for worship. Prayer and chanting are common acts of devotion, as are offerings of fruit, flowers, and incense. One of the most popular festivals in China and Japan is the Ullambana Festival, in which offerings are made to the spirits of the dead and to ghosts.

It is said that during this celebration the gates to the other world are open so that departed spirits can return to earth for a brief time. (1, 3, 4, 5) In the Christian faith, people may practice several methods to bring them closer to God or Heaven. One way has been around for many centuries, called baptisms. Baptism is an initiation into the religion. Jesus was among the first to be baptized. He was baptized by John at the beginning of his public ministry (Mark 1: 9-11). Another practice that is used among the Christian religion would be prayer. A Prayer may be individual or done as a group, formal or spontaneous, silent or spoken.

Christian prayer normally includes gospel, praise, thanksgiving, confession, and an appeal for forgiveness. Another ritual that is very similar to Lay Worship would be Christmas. People often celebrate this holiday as Jesus Christ's birth-date, even though it was not because of many biblical references, but despite that, People celebrate this with carols. The carols could be the equivalent of chanting holy scripts in Buddhism. (1, 2, 4) The Christian religion is not that similar to Buddhism for many reasons. One reason is that Buddhism does not have a God. In Buddhism, people do not worship anybody, since that divine being was also just human.

The goal is to achieve Nirvana, like the Buddha did. Christianity has a God and Jesus as his son. We worship God and Jesus. People strive to be noble and good. In Christianity, there is pursuit of happiness and morality, but not through greed.

Although the goal is not Nirvana, one goal is through prayer is to be truthful with yourself and God. Achieving Nirvana is very similar to achieving Heaven. In Christianity, there is one god, and in Buddhism there is no God. (1, 3, 4) To me, Christianity is more appealing to me, just because I have lived as a Christian, my whole life. If I had not, I believe I still would find Christianity more appealing, since there is a God to worship.

There is also a story of how the world began. Also it is more comforting, since in Buddhism, one should sacrifice themselves, like everything else is more important than you. Logically Christianity is better to me since people can about their daily lives without having to chant everyday. In Christianity, it is more logical that there is someone watching over you at all times. In Buddhism, no-one watches you, it is your conscience that knows what you do. (3, 4) In General, I believe that Christianity has some similar aspects but the path/direction is not the same.

God the Father, Jesus Christ the son, and the holy spirit are essentially one God. This is very different from Buddhism, since there is no God at all, just models to be like. In Christianity, there are many goals in life, for example, follow the ten commandments. Be truthful to yourself and God. Also in the Christian religion, there is no concept of reincarnation, there is incarnation of Jesus but no reincarnation.

In Buddhism, followers want to become enlightened and become a Buddha.

The goal in Christianity is to be truthful with yourself and one day you will go

to Heaven. (1, 3, 4, 5) Buddhism Sources: World Religions: A Voyage of

Discovery (1) The Bible (2) Encarta Encyclopedia 99 (3) Comptons

Encyclopedia Deluxe (4) Buddhist Cultures in America (5) Religion