

Presentation of the gospel to a buddhist



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Like the family and the economy, religion is a universal and pervasive phenomenon, a part of the cultural system, because it is assumed to meet some basic need of human being. Religion is an integrated part of human experience and shows remarkable continuity through time. Even in the modern secularized societies in the West, religion has persisted and still exerts a great influence in the lives of people.

Almost all known peoples in all places and times have some set of specific cultural patterns made up of beliefs and codes of conduct, tinged with emotional views, an explanation or justification of human behavior and social organization regarding the distribution of power between the leaders and the governed, the moral code, the distribution of wealth, or the success of some and failure of others may be found in religion. Buddhism is one of the most wide-spread religions all over the world. Buddhism began in India as a revolt against Hinduism.

The origin of the religion is described in the article BUDDHA. Buddha himself did not leave any writings, and his teachings were not written down until several hundred years after his death. Like Christianity, Buddhism is a missionary religion. Within 300 years after Buddha's death, it had spread throughout India and reached Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Monks and travelers carried it to other parts of Asia. Japan adopted it about the seventh century A. D. About the same time, the religion reached Tibet.

Here it was combined with native religions and developed into Lamaism (Carrithers, 2003). The two major divisions of Buddhism probably developed in Indian monasteries before 100 A. D. In India, the religion turned more and more to the ideas of Hinduism, until by 1000 Buddhism had virtually

disappeared from the country of its origin. Thesis Statement: This study scrutinizes the beliefs and practices of Buddhism and how can a gospel (Christianity) be presented to a Buddhist.

II. Background A. Beliefs and Practices

Buddhism consists of numerous sects with varying practices and beliefs. Some of these sects are so different from the others that they appear to be separate religions. But all sects have in common the belief that they are following the principles laid down by Gautama. Early Buddhism, the religion as taught by Gautama, developed into two branches—Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism.

- Early Buddhism Although Buddhism was originally a reform movement that rejected certain beliefs and practices of Hinduism, the two religions have several important beliefs in common.

Among them are reincarnation, the ideas that a living thing can be reborn in a new body; the law of karma, which holds that events in life are effects whose cause lies in previous lives and acts; and liberation, or salvation, the state of being free of the law of karma and rebirth (Conze, 2002). According to Buddhism, liberation is attained through understanding and practice of the Four Noble Truths:

1. There is suffering in life.
2. Suffering is caused by desire for pleasure, existence, and prosperity.
3. Suffering and rebirth cease when one ceases such desires, leading to enlightenment, or Nirvana, a blessed state in which peace, harmony, and joy are attained.

The way, or path, to Nirvana is the Eightfold Path, summarized as:

- Right understanding.
- Right thoughts.
- Right speech.
- Right conduct.
- Right occupation.
- Right effort.
- Right mindfulness.
- Right meditation.

The Eightfold Path is also called the Middle Way—because of its emphasis on avoiding such extremes as following sensuous pleasures on the one hand, and self-punishment on the other.

The Buddhists must at all times observe in the high moral principles described in the Eightfold path, which emphasizes nonviolence and the brotherhood of all (Mizuno, 1999). Perhaps the best-known Buddhist scriptures are the Tripitaka (“ Three Baskets”), first written down in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the Pali language about 25 B. C. A new, authoritative edition was prepared by the Sixth Buddhist Council at Rangoon, Burma, in 1954-56. The three Pitakas are about four times as long as the Bible. The early sacred writings of Buddhism contain no notion of an absolute God, an immortal soul, or a first cause.

The idea of God or soul in Buddhism is better understood not in the Christian sense, but rather in terms of that which underlies the condition called <https://assignbuster.com/presentation-of-the-gospel-to-a-buddhist/>

Nirvana (Mizuno, 1999). ? Theravada Buddhism The name Theravada means “ the way of the elders. ” It is an austere religion that requires solitude, meditation, and self-mastery through which each member hopes to achieve Nirvana. Because of these requirements, the possibility of liberation is limited to a few. Many of its followers are monks and nuns who spend most of their time in meditation and teaching.

Theravada Buddhism is sometimes called “ Hinayana Buddhism,” Hinayana meaning “ small vehicles,” but this term is not accepted by followers of the religion (Mizuno, 1999). ? Mahayana Buddhism Mahayana means “ large vehicle. ” It is a less austere system than Theravada Buddhism and emphasizes liberation for everyone. Many Mahayana Buddhists believe in liberation through good faith and good works. Their object is not only to obtain a personal Nirvana, but to help others to that goal (Carrithers, 2003). The Mahayana branch has developed a system of ideal Buddhas, or enlightened ones.

The most important Buddha is the Amitabha, or Amida, Buddha, to whom members can appeal for deliverance. Some Mahayana Buddhists also believe in a goddess, a symbol of compassion, who is called Kwan Yin in China and Kwannon in Japan. Mahayana Buddhists have elaborate temples presided over by priests. They have colorful festivals and solemn rituals. Statues of the various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Buddhas-to-be) play a part in their worship, but the statues themselves are not worshiped. Mahayana Buddhism is divided into many sects, including Zen, Jodo, Shin, Tendai, and Nichiren Shoshu (Soka Gakkai) (Carrithers, 2003).