

## What Can Christians Learn from Buddhists?

Philippians 4:8

Siddhartha Gautama, the man who became the Buddha was the son of a prince in what is now the country of Nepal. His mother died shortly after his birth and Siddhartha's father saw to it that his son had everything he ever wanted. He saw to it that Siddhartha was never exposed to the sufferings of other people. Gautama married at sixteen and had a son. His life was good!

Siddhartha eventually became restless in this luxury. Feeling that he was missing something, he started slipping out at night with a chariot and driver to see the rest of the world. Legend has it that during these outings Siddhartha was confronted with the harsh realities of human life.

He sees an old man, bent over, frail and in pain. He asks, "Is this the fate of all people?" The driver of his chariot answers, "Yes." Gautama sees a person suffering from a terminal illness, the disease slowing causing the person's death, and he asks again, "Is this the fate of all people?" The chariot driver says, "Yes." He observes a funeral procession, the family taking a loved one to the burial site and once more he asks, "Is this the fate of all people?" Again, the answer comes, "Yes, that is the end of us all." Siddhartha becomes

very depressed and filled with anxiety as he discovers the reality of suffering in life.

Siddhartha leaves his family and lives a somewhat monastic life. Six years later, at the age of thirty-five, he experiences a revelation which enlightens him about the meaning of life.

Siddhartha Gautama becomes Buddha, the enlightened one. He spends the next forty-five years teaching others what he's learned – teachings that are meant to bring freedom and peace to human beings. This peace saves people from the suffering in this life and eventually can deliver them from the endless circle of reincarnation. Reincarnation continues until people have become enlightened and are freed from the pain of this life.

Siddhartha is eventually recognized as THE Buddha, the enlightened one. As people follow these teachings, they will become free of the suffering that affected them in their previous lives and in this life until each one becomes an enlightened human being.

This path to enlightenment is based on THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS.

The First Noble Truth: Life is painful. Giving birth is painful for the mother. Growing up is painful for the child.

Losing the people and things we love is painful. Disease and death happen. Life is nothing but one pain after another.

The Second Noble Truth: Pain (or suffering) is the result of holding on instead of letting go. Pain is a given, suffering is optional. We suffer because we try to hold on to things, people and even life itself. Our inability to simply accept the pain is what causes us to suffer.

C.S. Lewis, Christian author once said, "If you want to avoid hurt, never love anyone or anything, not even your dog. To love is to open ourselves up to pain. The deeper the love, the deeper the pain.

The Buddha said, "If I did not cling, nothing would frighten me, because there would be nothing I would be afraid to lose, and nothing I would need to be happy."

The Third Noble Truth: It is possible to find liberation and enlightenment. The road to liberation is to become detached from the externals of life. Selfishness can be overcome. We can learn to choose our attitude of detachment by living life without complaining or resisting the painfulness of life. It is incredibly freeing to know that you do not need to be pleased in order to be happy or enlightened, says the Buddha.

The Fourth Noble Truth: Enlightenment comes as we follow the eight paths of life. These paths are:

1. Right Understanding
2. Right Ambitions or Hopes
3. Right Actions
4. Right Speech
5. Right Livelihood/Work
6. Right Effort
7. Right Focus
8. Right Mindfulness.

The apostle Paul, in Philippians, wrote, "Whatever is is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think on these things."

Not too long ago, Marcus Borg, a Christian theologian, and Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist co-authored a book titled, *Jesus and Buddha, the Parallel Teachings*.

The Buddha and Jesus lived hundreds of years and cultures apart, but there are striking parallels to their teachings. It isn't that they said exactly the same things. Rather it is that their distinctive and independent sayings go right to the core of our understanding of how we can live with peace and joy in our lives (If I understand Buddhism correctly, the Buddha would probably have used the term joy!).

These teachings of Jesus and the Buddha remind us that God, or truth or whatever word that we choose to call the ultimate energy of the universe is seen in very similar ways by people of all cultures when they are searching for a sense of meaning and purpose in human life. Let me illustrate by

reading just few of these parallel teachings of Jesus and Buddha...

**Buddha said:** With the relinquishing of all thought and egotism, the enlightened one is liberated through not clinging.

**Jesus said:** Those who want to save their life will lose it. Those who lose their life for my sake will save it.

**Buddha said:** Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings. Let your thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world.

**Jesus said:** This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

**Buddha said:** Consider others as yourself.

**Jesus said:** Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

**Buddha said:** One who acts on truth is happy, in this world and beyond.

**Jesus said:** You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

There are some Christians who get very fearful and angry when we suggest that people who live by the teachings of

another religion might please God. It causes me to wonder why I sometimes need to cling to a certain belief to the exclusion of all others. A Christian author recently wrote, "I tell other people about Jesus because I have experienced the truth of his teachings. I tell others about Jesus because I believe that we can truly see God's heart revealed in his teaching and in his life."

The author went on to say "I do not tell people about Jesus because I believe they will be punished by God for not becoming Christians."

I know that I still have plenty of room to grow in this area of learning new ways to see ancient truths as taught by Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. I pray that I will be a living example of the still speaking God's message that "No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life's journey you're welcome here."

This is my on-going prayer and I will pray this as I once again pray "our" prayer. Join me as I pray, *"God, help me see what you want me to see. Jesus, help me love myself and others as you want me to love. Holy Spirit, help me live in the power of faith, in the optimism of hope and in the joy of love. Amen."*