

*Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World*

**WORKSHOP NOTES**

OCF July Camp, Port Sea, 2006

"Trust in the Lord Always"

**Introduction:**

Evangelism and Witnessing

Guidelines and principles in exploring/understanding other faiths → Why?

- To have a good basic understanding of the religion of others  
 - To present the gospel in a relevant and understandable way.

**Means of learning**  
 - Books  
 - People from other faith  
 - Media  
 - Etc...

**Pitfalls**  
 - accommodation & dilution of doctrine  
 - unacceptable incorporation of foreign practices and features  
 - comparing religions without grounded conviction

**Avoiding It**  
 - Scriptural Truth & Supremacy (1 Tim 4:6, Heb 4:12)  
 - Christian Community (accountability)  
 - Faithfulness and commitment  
 - Contextualizing the method NOT the message  
 - Upholding the uniqueness, supremacy and sufficiency of Christ

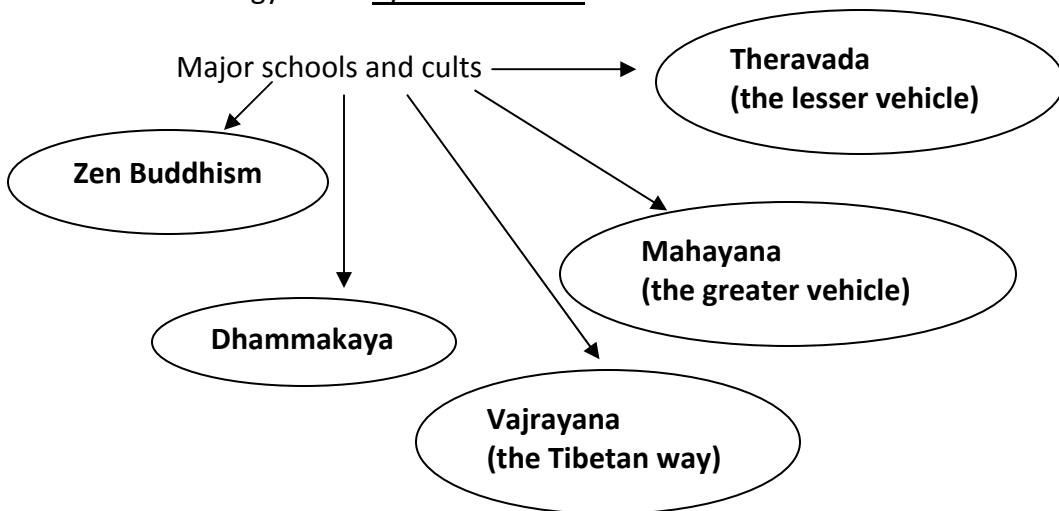
**TRIVIA QUESTIONS**

1. How many Buddhist adherents are there in the world today?
2. Who was the founder of Buddhism and when was it founded?
3. What was the name of the tree and what is the significance of the event that happened there?
4. What are the 4 noble truths?
5. What does the eight-fold path consist of?
6. What branches/denominations of Buddhism have you heard of/about?
7. List key words and explain their meaning with regard to the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism.



## Buddhism – Some Key Points and Helpful Information

Analogy of the Syncretic nature: A Smoothie Blend of Fruits



**THE MIDDLE WAY:**  
*The path to enlightenment*  
 Avoiding the extremes of  
 asceticism and affluence

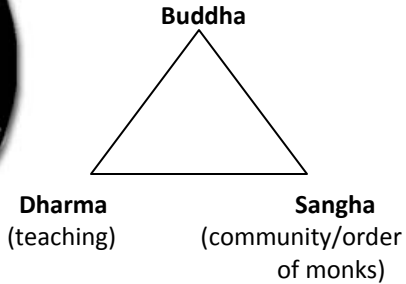
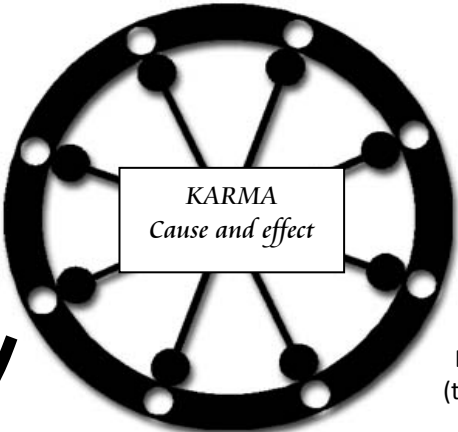
**Buddha – The Enlightened One** (Siddharta Gautama) 6<sup>th</sup> C  
 Enlightenment received while meditating under the Bo Tree  
 (1) He saw his previous lives pass before him  
 (2) He saw the cycle, birth, death and rebirth (*reincarnation*)  
 and the law that governs the cycle (*karma*)  
 (3) He discerned the four holy, or noble truths  
 - The goal is to detach oneself from all worldly pleasures,  
 maintaining a state of neutrality and balance  
 - There is no such things as a soul (*anatta*) – absence of self  
 - Upholds the doctrine of *anicca* (impermanence or  
 transitoriness)  
 - Karma cannot be undone, altered, avoided or forgiven  
 - One has no knowledge of their past life  
 - No merit transference except where it is implicated by the  
 presence of Bodhisattvas (everybody for themselves)  
 Self-responsibility

### Beliefs and Behaviours

**THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS**  
*The condition, cause and cure of suffering*  
 1. All is suffering (*Dukkha*)  
 2. The cause of suffering is desire (*Tanha*)  
 3. The solution to suffering is to extinguish  
 all desire (*Nirodha*)  
 4. The method to eradicate desire is  
 Through the Eight-Fold Path (*Marga*)

**Common Buddhist Terms**  
 Enlightenment, Karma, Mantra,  
 Sutra, Merit, Samsara, Zen,  
 Mahayana, Theravada, Pali

**NIRVANA:**  
 A condition of non-  
 existence, emptiness  
 and nothingness

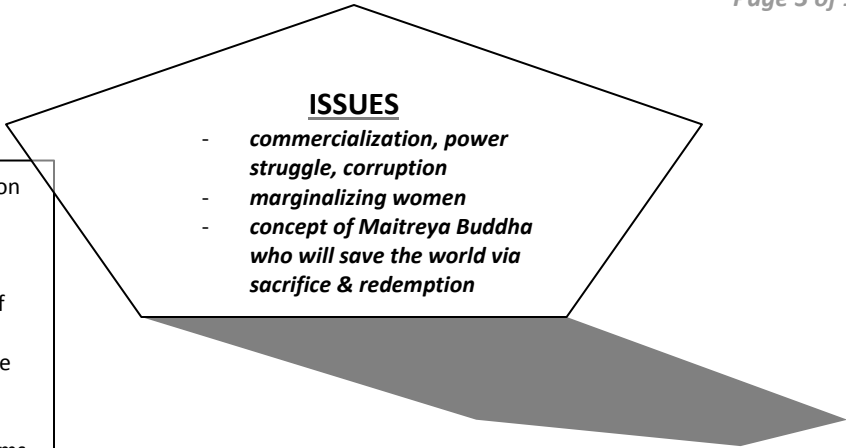


**THE EIGHT-FOLD PATH**  
*Wisdom: Understanding the Problem*  
 1. Right knowledge, understanding, views  
 2. Right attitude, purpose, thought, motives  
*Ethical Conduct: Living Morally*  
 3. Right speech  
 4. Right conduct  
 5. Right way of living (livelihood), occupation  
*Mental Discipline: Exerting Rigorous Effort*  
 6. Right effort  
 7. Right awareness, mindfulness  
 8. Right composure, meditation,  
 contemplation

Issues, Concerns and Challenges

**The appeal/attraction:**

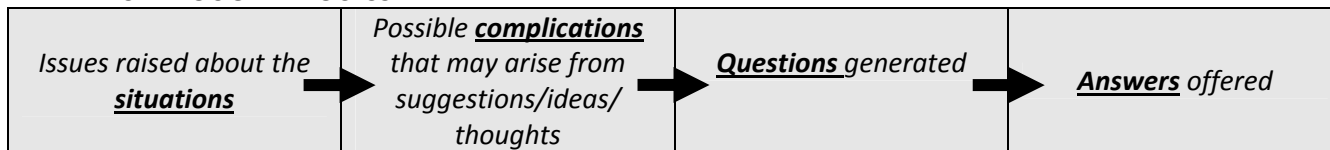
- the doctrine of cause and effect enables the understanding and interpretation of many events and circumstances/condition in the world
- the doctrine of assimilation promotes racial and religious integrity and tolerance – peace and harmony with each other
- the doctrine of the middle way emphasizes balance and neutrality instead of extremes
- the doctrine of karma/merits gives one a tangible perspective on how he/she should their life
- the doctrine tolerates but dominates other local belief and culture systems including pluralism, relativism, animism, post-modernism and many other isms.



- Accuse Christianity of disruption of culture, changing societies
- Strengthening their influences
- Response to gospel tracts and methods
- Buddhism is on the move!

**Resurgence , Resistance and Responses:**

**A HELPFUL THOUGHT PROCESS:**



Compare and Contrast with Christianity:

Gather in small groups to identify and evaluate the COWS of reaching out and relating to a Buddhist. (Brainstorm)

Challenges	Opportunities	Weaknesses	Strengths	Suggestions

**Spot the Differences (Comparing and Contrasting)**



Christianity		Buddhism
Divine revelation		Human intuition, observation
The nature of God – personal Creator/controller		Impersonal non-being (like karma)
The nature of Christ-God/man		Only human, redeeming substitute or impotent to help
The nature of life – one single life	<b>Versus</b>	A circle of multiple lives via rebirth
Sin – Transgression		Sin – Illusion
The means of salvation – faith, grace, divine provision		Salvation by works, karmic merit, self effort (focus is on the subject)
Relationship with God		Religion and works
Love, Grace, Mercy, Hope		Self-dependence, futility, fatality
Absolute Truth		All knowledge is subjective and illusionary

**Challenges and Comments:**

- meaning discrepancy and varying definition of terms
- view of God: equated with karma or ignorance
- some contact points → suitable?

*Similarities are suggested but are often regarded as mostly superficial. Some of them, however, may be contact points like the view of suffering, cause and effect etc...explored more later.*

**Gospel Sharing**

What we need to realize about

**(i) Challenges**

Buddhism dominates and integrates many local belief structures including animism and other isms, but did not dislodge nor destroy them. A great variety of Buddhist societies arose. The amalgamation of many religious elements under Buddhism produced a strong national, racial, and religious identity with Buddhism (point of application: for a Buddhist to become a Christian, there are cultural, familial, social and religious consequences!)

**(ii) Effective Communication**

- realize that perceptions and understandings of common or foreign terms may differ/vary
- realize that the focus should be on what is said and heard (check their understanding of the intended meaning and purpose)
- realize that their faith is often a syncretic mix (they may have some understanding of god, heaven, hell)
- realize their mentality, perspective and method of thinking/conceptualization. Some may see conversion to Christianity as a possible assimilative/integrative doctrine. Others might see that this life may be an opportunity to become and understand the Christian lifestyle and faith in their process of becoming a better person

*It is important to distinguish, clarify and explain terms, concepts and even symbols! Each of these may vary in meaning although they use they share common terminology and representations.*

### Engaging In Conversation with the Buddhist Mind (Tackling the Differences)

Concepts/Doctrines	Response
<p><b>1. There is No God</b> (Malachi 3:6, Heb 11:6, 13:8)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Biblical concept of a supreme personal God who exists outside of His creation and who, in power and glory, brought all things into being is denied by Buddhism. Ultimate reality is an impersonal void and emptiness. (<i>sunyata</i>)</li> <li>- All supernatural beings, including angels, demons and all gods were rejected by the Buddha. No creator, no omnipotent loving God.</li> <li>- God is sometimes equated with either “ignorance” or “karma”</li> <li>- Buddhists often demand some form of a tangible proof/evidence of God’s existence.</li> <li>- <i>Counter:</i> Ask them to show the scent of a rose or describe the essence of electricity. Or how the wind blows, unseen but we see the effects of it.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Christ’s Deity Denied</b> (Matthew 16:13-16)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Christian: As the perfect God-man, Christ is the only sinless Saviour of the world.</li> <li>- Buddhist: Jesus is often regarded as a good man, a prophet, the founder of the Christian religion, or even the younger brother of Buddha or a Bodhisattva.</li> <li>- The concept of Christ’s deity is incomprehensible to the Buddhist mind. <i>How would you communicate Phillipians 2:6-11 and the concept of the Trinity?(remember not to get them confused with God in different forms as definitions vary and implications are significant)</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Man is Not a Spiritual Being</b> (Gen 1:26-27)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Bible teaches that man and woman were “made in the image of God”. All are spiritual beings possessing a precious eternal. quality. Humans are living souls with personality, value and dignity.</li> <li>- The Buddha did not hold to mankind having soul or personality.</li> <li>- People are regarded as impermanent and transitory, ever facing the problem of how to escape from suffering. All life is meaningless.</li> <li>- <i>Counter:</i> Christ received, however, brings rich fulfillment and gives true meaning to life. (John 10:10)</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Karma is the Iron Law</b> (Rom 7:15-25)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To a Buddhist, karma is the iron law. No one escapes either reincarnation or suffering. This engenders fatalistic attitudes.</li> <li>- <i>Counter:</i> Christ’s gospel offers hope, salvation and optimism for both present and future, even in the midst of suffering. It gives us a new view and perspective of suffering. The power of Christ brings transformation. It is by grace, mercy and love.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Sin Has No Consequences</b> (Ref: 2 Ways To Live)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different concepts of sin (stark contrast!)</li> <li>- Buddhist: Sin does not have any consequences before a holy God. It is not defined by doctrine, for to them existence is sin. They think that “desire” or transitory deception is sin. Popularly, sin is killing life in any form. Sin is believed to be the effect of one’s karma. At best, sin is an illusion, though the karmic consequences will accumulate for those who fail to break the endless cycles of reincarnation.</li> <li>- Hard to point out that they are a sinner when they do not acknowledge it themselves. It is difficult to help one who does not sense a need.</li> <li>- <i>Counter:</i> Christian identifies sin as a principle in all humankind, a flaw resulting from the Fall. In practice, sins are violations of God’s character, an affront to Him by falling short of His standards, and subsequently moral failures. Real consequences exist. We have two choices in life, two ways to live. These are the choices that we are all faced (and stuck) with.</li> </ul>


**Praying for Buddhist Peoples**

Committing to pray for the Buddhists around us.

**Burden**  
The growing influence of Buddhism. The lostness of people. (2 Cor 4:4)

**Tough Work**  
Missionswork among Buddhists has been slow and many at times discouraging. It’s hard ground. Pray for endurance, perseverance and faithfulness in sharing Jesus to them.

*What can we pray for?* (pg 28-30, Buddhism through Christian Eyes)  
Some suggestions:  
Pray for gospel presenters, gospel faithfulness, gospel clarity and gospel opportunities.  
(challenges/barriers, fruit, opening of minds and hearts, clear and receptive understanding of the message, wisdom in communication, discernment in terms definition and differences, repentance, bold and faithful witnessing, protection and nurture of new believers from Buddhist cultures, the message of Christ’s redemption and sacrifice be preached faithfully, Christians to exhibit holy, disciplined lifestyles as examples, models – reflectors of Christ, for training and equipping and confidence)



<p><b>6. Salvation Through Self: Merit Vs Grace</b> (Eph 2:8-9)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Christian: Salvation is possible only through the grace of God through the provision of Christ.</li> <li>- Buddhist: No saviour exists. Buddha said he cannot help anyone, he could only point the way. Each person must deliver one's self. Self deliverance is by doing massive good works and making merit. One must overcome karma by self effort.</li> <li>- The concept of substitution is lacking in Buddhist. That's why it is difficult to comprehend Christ's substitutionary death. (barrier)</li> <li>- <i>Counter:</i> Use helpful analogies to illustrate sacrificial love and substitution. (analogies that they can identify with)</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Enlightenment by Eliminating Desire</b> (John 10:10)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In Buddhism, there is no difference between good desire and bad desire; even to desire life itself is to be unenlightened.</li> <li>- Life is often equated with pleasures and attachment, hence suffering entails.</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Hope Lies in Death, Not Life</b> (John 17:1-5, 1 Peter 1:3-5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impermanence vs eternity, self-centered orientation vs altruism.</li> <li>- Most glaring contrast: Ultimate "hope" in Buddhism is death or extinction. In Christ it is eternal life.</li> </ul>
<p><b>9. Biblical Truth and Outreach</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Buddhists have their teachings from monks or spiritual leaders (dhamma). Some belief in recordings by Buddha's followers (sutra, pali).</li> <li>- Buddhists often question the reliability/authority/validity of our Scriptures.</li> <li>- Challenges: To be grounded in the foundations of Biblical truth and share it with true knowledge and discernment. Realize the urgency and commit to reaching out to Buddhists in prayer and by loving and meaningful ministry. (1 Peter 3:15)</li> <li>- <i>Counter:</i> Explaining the supremacy of Scripture via historical evidence and explaining the what, who, why, how, when (after Dan Brown's push) with regards to the Bible.</li> </ul>

*The grace of God's gospel is still the "power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16) Only in Christ is there real hope and assurance, true life and meaning. Joy and gratitude in receiving God's grace and being able to enjoy a relationship with Him. By faith alone. Not works. Karma is a judge, but karma and merit cannot balance each other out.*

**Sharing Life with Buddhists**

**Clarify Essential Concepts**



Between Christians and Buddhists there exists much misunderstanding about the definition and meanings of the terms, concepts and even symbols (as evident with its multiple interpretations after watching the Da Vinci Code), falsely taken as equivalent to each other. Patient discussion may help clarify these foundational beliefs. Christians must clearly explain key concepts that are most difficult for Buddhists to comprehend or accept.

**Have Confidence**



Trust God to do His work. The Holy Spirit's role in evangelism. The transforming powerful Word of God proclaimed. Faithful in following Christ's model (Acts 10:38). Godly living witness of Christ and demonstrating God's love and peace to Buddhists. Be available as God's instruments of service, ready and prepared to minister always. Be hopeful, expectant and positive. Always dependent on Christ through prayer, obedience and faith.

**Practice Love and Patience**



Commit to pray. Respect followers of other faiths. Reflect models of the Christian home with moral and ethical living. Rigorously earn the right to speak – be credible, honest and loving with integrity and humility. Recognize the good that they do. Reject any attitude to judge, criticize or make fun of others' belief. Instead, open up discussion and dialogue with them on why they believe what they believe. Relate to them in true and genuine Christian care, concern, love and affection. Be ready to share Christ. Give them God's Word on appropriate occasion or when interest arises. Resist the temptation of pressuring them to believe or listen to the gospel. Serve them sensitively and patiently as opportunity affords. Eg. pray for them when they are sick, encourage them in trouble, help them in crisis. Rejoice with them in the good times, acknowledge God's work.

**Doctrine Clash**

1. Buddha basically taught the ability of self to free oneself from corruption and suffering, to obtain a state of perfect non-existence, without the help of God. In modern terms, this simply means man does not have to answer to a higher authority than himself, and man is basically good and can become good by his own efforts. This he can do without the help from God, or any reference to God. Like other human-initiated religions, Buddhism is a projection of human thinking out to the infinite. Christianity, on the other hand, stems from God's self disclosure to man. This divine revelation climaxed in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is therefore centered in a transcendent God, revealing Himself in terms of man's own culture and language.
2. Buddhism rejects the concept of a personal God and for that matter, of any spiritual personality, either human or divine. God in the Christian sense is unknown to Buddhists. In place of a personal Creator they hold the error of *karma* – cause and effect – as the exclusive principle to explain the universe. What or who initiated karma is undetermined. In modern times, God has been interpreted in Buddhist religious terminology. Again the danger of definitions and conceptualization is to be carefully discerned. This can happen by the subtle syncretism by taking the Christian form of God into Buddhist writings, while maintaining basic Buddhist meaning. (God=*avijja*=lack of knowledge, ignorance, the basic cause of evil – the power of nature which caused all things to exist, and as such cause suffering)
3. The doctrine of *anicca* (impermanence or transitoriness), *anatta* (soullessness or absence of self), and *dukkha* (sorrow, suffering). Simple logic says if we do not start with God we shall not end with Him, and when we start with Him we do not end with those doctrines. Contrast this with Christian doctrines: The existence of God means the existence of an order of life which is eternal (*nicca* – permanence), it implicated the presence of a soul (*atta*) – an identity guarded by God's Sovereignty, and that sorrow – *dukkha* – is seen to consist, not so much in the transitoriness of things, as in the perverseness of our wills which seeks these things instead of the things which are eternal. Therefore, start with God → man realize that God alone affords the most adequate base for a most meaningful explanation of life's most significant events. Buddha saw life was meaningless in itself, and set out to rescue men from this meaninglessness. Jesus saw life could become meaningful in God, and set out to call men to share that meaning (John 10:10). In Buddhism, death is the final category. In the gospel, the final category is life. Buddhists seek to shorten 'life', to escape from the never ending cycle of rebirths. The gospel emphasizes everlasting life.
4. True Christianity is centered in altruism. Because karma encourages preoccupation with self-dependence, Buddhism becomes self-centered. This social difference is significant. The Buddhist social order is dominated by the individual, and there is a lack of sense of relation, man to man, and man to God. Buddhist often ask when faced with kindness or shown concern: "What are you getting out of this? More merit, rewards? Or what? The concept of selfless constraining love of Christ for others is foreign to Buddhist thinking – we are often regarded as 'nice' and 'gentle' people. To the Christian, the way up is down, taking the servant role, being a doormat to fellow men. To the Buddhist the way up is self-preoccupation. To focus on self and use opportunities to advance themselves in this scale of karma. Note that even among Christians, such attitudes may prevail, but they are contrary to the biblical gospel.
5. For the Buddhist, the principle of salvation rests on self-effort and reliance on their own human energies and ability. "Depend only on self." The gospel, however, declares that dependence on self and confidence in the flesh spells doom. We are utterly helpless apart from the grace of God in Christ alone. Salvation comes through dependence on Almighty God, made operational through the believer's faith (Eph 2:8-9, Gal 2:20, 3:7, Rom 3:28, 4:1-28)
6. Buddhist karma tends to implicate fatalism, hopelessness, self-excusing and pessimism. There is no possibility of forgiveness only the iron rule of karma and weighing out the good and the bad. Contrast this with the gospel of the loving God who gives forgiveness, hope and an exchanged life, made possible through the power of Christ's shed blood. Christ's atonement is sufficient for cleansing from the past, power in the present and hope in the future.

**Associations:** Grace, Culture, Good Works...

The concept of grace is unacceptable to a Buddhist. How can someone pay or deal with all my wrongdoings? That's not fair. There's nothing I do on my part. I simply cannot accept that. By undermining and downplaying the significance of the role of good works, they feel worthless or empty and even out of control. It negates the very foundations and principle of karma. There are some cultural associations seen in this concept as well such the Asian upbringing of hard work=success. The following expressions illustrate this point:

*Nothing is free in this world. You reap what you sow. You're responsible for your own actions. Nobody can help you if you can't help yourself. Nothing comes easy, you have to work for it. If you want to earn/achieve something, you need to work hard. If something is too good to be true, it probably isn't. Self-effort, depend only on self, you can't trust anyone else. I believe in the self-made man/woman!*

**Communicating the Gospel*****For your own notes...***

What it is NOT!

*The Converter, The Debater*

*Not integrative syncretism or fully adapting the gospel to the Buddhist context to make it more appealing either by selective theology or 'cherry picking'.*

What is SHOULD BE!

*It is to be faithful and truthful presentation of the Word of God, clothed in meaningful communication and faithful witness to Christ. We ought to communicate with our actions, words and thoughts – being reflectors of Christ through the demonstration of a righteous and pure life and life that displays love.*

**Some suggestions for questions that raise interests and provoke thoughts:**

1. What is the purpose of your life...does life have a purpose?
2. All religions lead to the same God, is that possible? Can it work out that way?
3. Do you think you're good enough to earn a place in Heaven? Salvation by works – does it work?
4. Is there an afterlife or a God to be bothered about coz if it does it sure concerns you and how you choose to live your life.

Amidst cultural relativism, situational ethics, secularism and humanism, it is IMPORTANT to clearly define (present God's Word for what it is), defend (upholding Scriptural truths and standing by it), and demonstrate (live it out practically and relationally). This call to declare the gospel must NEVER undermine or reduce the Uniqueness of Christ, the Authority of the Bible and the Necessity of the Gospel. This should encompass the revelation of God, the cross of Christ (its daily discipleship, mission and message) and the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. However, we should also have a sympathetic understanding, a sensitivity of the Buddhist situation, issues and dilemmas. Our approach should be one of wisdom, sensitivity, humility and loving persuasion. Our central focus should be on the testimony of Jesus Christ. Communicating this gracious relationship across effectively is vital. We should be a living demonstration of the gospel.

**Effective Communication**

*Understanding the context helps you present the gospel in a clear, understandable, wise, sensitive and meaningful manner/way.*

- (i) Contextual barriers: culture, social association/solidarity/integration → identity. Education and upbringing. Buddhist terms, connotations and concepts.
- (ii) Said Vs Heard: There should be a clear delivery and reception of the communicated message. Consider the use and clarification of terms. Otherwise you might just end up with a Buddhist gospel!
- (iii) Problem of meaning: Reception and understanding. Varying interpretations. Meaning might also be formed within a cultural grid. Encourage feedback and interaction, check understanding and communicate on the same wavelength (simply not with too much jargon). Be a good listener. Their comprehension is often based on presuppositions, assumptions, premises and preconceived ideas. Repeating and paraphrasing is a good skill to learn as you go.
- (iv) Don't forget that the conviction of sin and the enabling of the person to understand and receive the message require the Holy Spirit's work. So remember to do it prayerfully, dependent on God's strength, guidance and wisdom.

**METHODS/STRATEGIES OF APPROACHES**

*It is important to present a complete and clear view of the gospel i.e. God's wrath/judgment and His grace, love*

**THE APOLOGETIC APPROACH**

- contrasting and exploring inconsistencies in doctrines and application of that knowledge, forming a basis for argument.
- logically convincing a Buddhist of the gospel.
- centers around the truth and person of God as Creator of the world and men (Genesis), the problem with the human condition after the Fall and the solution which is forgiveness and remission of sins through Christ Jesus.
- clarifying their interpretation of God as *avijja*, discussing concepts like *vinyaan* (soul, spirit) and *nipaan* (nirvana) – lead them to an understanding of the real source of ignorance, suffering and evil.
- usually effective among thinking and educated Buddhists. Most Buddhists are nominal especially those from a Buddhist family background. They know just the basic concepts and can explain no further. Most of them argue from a scientific or philosophical point of view set against a pluralistic (post-modernistic) mentality. To them, knowledge is subjective rather than objective and absolute.
- more valuable in teaching Christians to understand their faith in contrast to the Buddhist way of thinking.
- carefully presenting the argument sensitively, wisely, meaningfully, clearly and convincingly. Be winsome!
- be wary that difficult questions may be raised regarding Christianity. This may include questions regarding creation, explanation for God and suffering, the inconsistencies of teaching and character, evidence for God, the authority of Scripture and the concept of grace, judgment and end of the world.

### POINTS OF CONTACT APPROACH

#### Other points of contact:

- merits vs mercy
- the view of suffering
- reincarnation, death and life
- hope vs futility and fatality
- cause and effect, fallen nature
- sacrifice vs self-preservation
- dependence vs detachment
- true peace
- motive of doing good
- worldview, perspectives on life
- eternal life vs nirvana
- Etc...

- the use of Buddhism as a stepping stone to explaining and sharing Christianity.
- there are some ethical and moral similarities
- karma: when we explain the work of Christ on the cross as paying the penalty for our sins, we can point out that every religion believes that people have to pay for their wrongdoing. The Buddhists call it karma, the Christians call it judgment for the belief is universal. The solution to the problem, however, is different (i.e. how those consequences are overcome)
- point them to the impossibility of self-redemption and that we are never good enough to achieve that. When they realize the hopeless condition, point them to Christ, raise questions regarding the idea of one dying for another's sins and then explain it as it is a foreign concept.
- draw on redemptive, substitutionary, sacrificial analogies and illustrations.
- aim to engage in meaningful conversation, stirring and raising interesting and important questions. Clarify terms and concepts.
- an 'interest-awakening' question or statement is a point of contact
- dangers: syncretism, promoting pluralism. Do not be afraid or ashamed, instead proclaim humbly the Supremacy and Uniqueness of Christ and maintaining the authority of the Bible.
- other contact points include *merit transference* (alms, good deeds, relatives, Bodhisattvas) – point them to God's love and who can effectively take away our sin

### THE SHAME THEOLOGY APPROACH

- shame vs guilt. "Losing face" and its Asian cultural roots.
- shame is often derived from purely selfish reasons, especially in the individualistic cultural setting.
- note the theological difference. One draws attention to self, the other points to a shortfall of a set of standards.
- be aware that cultural difference exist.
- main aim is to overcome Buddhist preoccupation with self and acceptance of accountability to God.
- drawing focus away from self and overcoming the self-revolving syndrome.
- direct it instead to our responsibility and concern for others and especially to God.
- there are points where shame does have a wider orientation.
- Point them to what Christ has done (how Christ's work takes away their guilt & shame)

**THE 'SCRATCH WHERE IT ITCHES' APPROACH**

- catering to appropriate needs of individuals/group.
- the gospel is relevant to their need(s), applying the gospel where people hurt (solution)
- practical and relational Christianity: demonstration of good works , love and upholding integrity and purity. Establishing credibility and being committed to faithful Christian living.
- being sensitive to the heartbeat of others.
- theology (gospel pronouncement) goes hand in hand with social service/charity/mercy ministry
- at what point does the gospel truly ministers to those deep-seated fears and aspirations of the Buddhist heart's needs? Patience is required as the process is slow.
- 'gospel saturation' helps breaks ignorance and barriers over a period of time.
- bear in mind that many have not heard the gospel or its views, how then can an immediate decision be necessarily expected of them, allow them to consider the truth and gravity of this decision (use of *scale of awareness*)

**THE POWER ENCOUNTER APPROACH**

- Buddhists often have a vague concept of a god. Most make associations with Buddha as they regard him with deep respect and honour.
- their recognition and acknowledgement of power through rituals and symbols are often derived from a fundamental concern for protection, security, vulnerability or even power over others.
- our role is to point them to the Supremacy of our Living Saviour, Jesus Christ who has power over all these elements. Only through Christ, is there true and real peace, hope and freedom.
- be committed to sharing from the Bible: (give illustrations to help explain) (John 1:1-3, Col 1:16-17→Gen 1:26-27, 2:7-25→Gen 3, Rom 5:12, John 8:34, Eph 2:1-3→John 1:14, 18, 29→John 1:10-13, 15:26, 16:12-15→Acts 1:8, Ezek 3:19-20)
- remember the social and cultural implications for a Buddhist converting
- It's a choice with significant consequences. Truly the superiority of the power of Christ above everything else in our lives is a dynamic approach that will bring Buddhists to a living relationship with Christ.
- recognize that it is the power and grace of God that the church receives its stability, sustenance and permanence in the midst of a socially antagonistic society.

**Other Issues:**

## ➤ Communicating the gospel with your parents

*This is a hard one as the closer you are to someone; it seems more difficult to share the gospel as the other person knows us intimately. A life that is consistent and a faithful witness to Christ through the demonstration of love, care, concern and responsibility is often the 'winsome' factor in this relationship. Parents are usually concerned about their children's personal character development and want the best for their children. Our lives bear significant influence to our parents – our words and actions. Pray for wisdom and opportunities to share the gospel. Bear in mind to do so sensitively and wisely with respect. Another suggestion is to raise questions (out of curiosity and interest) about your parent's faith. This should be done carefully in a way that you want to genuinely understand and explore the religion/faith you were brought up with (contact points). Also, you can talk about God, pray during meal times. Parents keep a close observation of their children's life. How we appraise and deal with life's problems, challenges and trials is often a testimony to them of the difference Christ has made in us. Parents are often simply concerned that their child will become an extremist or are involved with cult groups. So, simply put, the effective witness is your very lifestyle. '*

## ➤ A Comment of Idols

*The Bible holds a strong view against idols (Acts 17:29, Rom 1:25). However, we should realize that although some Buddhists regard idols of Buddha, Kwan Yin, god of prosperity, protection etc to be objects of worship; many others regard them as symbols, monuments that serve as a reminder of their faith and responsibilities. It gives them a sense of identity. For some, it might serve as an object of security or dependence (asking lesser gods for small favours). These apparent contradictions of fundamental doctrines exist but bear in mind, the assimilative and integrative nature of Buddhism.(it tolerates and does not dislodge the other elements it absorbs – this is what makes it appealing to the individual and the pluralistic/post-modernistic culture). Pick and mix to suit your taste and needs.*

**Conclusions:**

- I. Acknowledge the reality of spiritual warfare and barriers/challenges to gospel sharing among Buddhists.
  - pray and acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit, God's Sovereignty and proclaim Christ's final, complete and perfect work of redemption on the cross.
- II. Bear in mind the socio-cultural clash and Buddhism's assimilative nature.
  - Buddhism has permeated and integrated into cultures, traditions and various other identities. It is intrinsically linked with culture, upbringing and character. Eg. *It is a way of life. To be Thai is to be Buddhist.*
  - What impact does a conversion of a Buddhist have in terms of the social consequences.
  - Christianity is not and should not be associated with any one culture. It is cross-cultural (in all senses of the phrase)
- III. There is a need for discernment and clarification of terms and concepts. To distinguish the differences that exist between Christianity and Buddhism. Dispel and avoid stereotyping.

IV. Be aware of the challenges and barriers of gospel communication:

- social pressure, identity, a sense of betrayal, disloyalty
- fundamental differences
- syncretism and mix
- social, doctrinal and practical resistance
- association of Christianity with Western culture and influence, colonization – a foreign religion, historical and previous experiences, presuppositions and preconceived ideas
- rejection of cultural values and practices. The idea the Christianity dislodges and disrupts tradition and changes societal values and systems). Promotion of disharmony and disintegration.
- retaining one’s original culture and practices (what is and is not acceptable)
- charge of arrogance and intolerance
- Previous bad, unpleasant experience and encounters with Christians. Misconceptions and bad press about the church.

V. Recognize the necessary bold and humble confrontation of the gospel with Buddhism.

- Contrast the Living Saviour with the sleeping Buddha.
- Combine the truth-centered approach with a person-centered approach
- Effective communication and deep Biblical foundations while being sensitive and wise in conversation.
- Remember that Christ’s love compels us and our desire/concern is for the lost to come to know Jesus and have saving faith through Him.
- There is only one way and it is found in Christ (John 8:32, 14:6). The difference between religion and relationship should be considered.
- Christianity is not an alternative. There is objective and subjective truth i.e. the authority of the Bible and the revelation of God.

**Questions & Answers**



*Sharing (what they’ve learnt and putting it into practice), discussion and prayer in small groups*

*Encouraging, supporting and building each other up in the gospel ministry.*

*Realizing that it is a partnership (Phil 1:27-30)*

*The call for integrity, stability, truth, unity and endurance*

**Challenge:**

*Write three names of Buddhists (friends, family, coursemates, colleagues etc) you want to commit to pray for and share the gospel with:*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## References and Bibliography:



### Recommended books

*Buddhism and the Claims of Christ* by D.T. Niles, 1967.

*Buddhism through Christian Eyes* by Alex Smith. OMF International.

*Buddhism In A Nutshell:*

Edward Conze, 'Buddhism: The Mahayana' in R C Zaehner (ed), A Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths (London: Hutchinson, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1977)

Christmas Humphreys, Buddhism (Harmondsworth, England: Pelican Books, 1951)

The World's Religions: A Lion Handbook (Oxford, England: Lion Publishing, paperback edn, 1988)

*Christianity at the religious roundtable: evangelicalism in conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* By: Tennent, Timothy C.. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. Publication Type: Book

Review of the book: Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World. *Journal of Asian Mission* 6:2 (2004)

*Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World*, David Lim and Steve Spaulding, eds.

(Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2003). Paper, x+210 pp., ISBN: 0-87808-506-8,

*Sharing Christ in the Tibetan Buddhist World* by Marku Tserine. Interserve.

A practical guide, in 220 pages, explaining Buddhism, particularly the Tibetan form that has come to the West in the Dalai Lama, with ways to communicate with and minister Christ to Buddhists.

*Sharing a language of faith* by Charles W. Swain, Christian Century, December 9, 1981, pp. 1282-1285

*Sharing the Truth in Love: How to relate to people of other faiths* by Ajith Fernando

Discovery House Publishers, 2001 ISBN: 971-92796-4-8

*Tearing Down Strongholds—Prayer for Buddhists* by Elizabeth Wagner. From Christian Literature Crusade. Phone: 800-659-1240.

A 60-page booklet giving an overview of Buddhism, including how to pray for Buddhists.

*The work of an evangelist : International Congress for Itinerant Evangelists, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

By: Douglas, James D. (Editor). Minneapolis, Minn : World Wide Pubns, 1984. Publication Type: Book

### Websites

[One Billion Wait](http://www.onebillionwait.org). [www.onebillionwait.org](http://www.onebillionwait.org)

Resources for understanding Buddhism and ministering to them, by OMF International

[Buddhism, a Christian perspective](http://www.gospelcom.net/oci/buddhism.htm) [www.gospelcom.net/oci/buddhism.htm](http://www.gospelcom.net/oci/buddhism.htm)

[General introduction to Buddhism](http://www.greatcom.org/resources/areadydefense/ch25/default.htm), by [Josh McDowell](http://www.greatcom.org/resources/areadydefense/ch25/default.htm)

[www.greatcom.org/resources/areadydefense/ch25/default.htm](http://www.greatcom.org/resources/areadydefense/ch25/default.htm)

[General explanation of Buddhism and Christian faith](http://www.christianeuropeonline.org/world/Apologetics/Religions/Buddhism/), by [Christian World](http://www.christianeuropeonline.org/world/Apologetics/Religions/Buddhism/).

[www.christianeuropeonline.org/world/Apologetics/Religions/Buddhism/](http://www.christianeuropeonline.org/world/Apologetics/Religions/Buddhism/)

### Videos

"Buddhist Teachers Resource Packet." A packet of resources on Buddhism to use in the church to understand and minister to those involved. It includes two videos, overheads, Bible studies, brochures, and prayer guides. [OMF International](http://www.omf.org).

### Organization whose focus is on ministering to Buddhists

[OMF International](http://www.au.omf.org) (AUST) [www.au.omf.org](http://www.au.omf.org)

OMF Website: [www.au.omf.org](http://www.au.omf.org)

Brief summary article on:

**The Buddhist billion  
Chinese religions**

### People sources (verbal):

*Various sources are quoted and used in this article. The sources include a variety of Buddhist adherents or former Buddhists from different cultures and backgrounds.*