



Nearly every people group in the world has a religious system. Many believe that religion was created as a way for people to explain the unexplainable or as a way to control the hearts and actions of people. It is also possible that there is something in the heart of mankind that longs for “something” beyond and direction by which to live purposely. In this module we will explore the frameworks of various religions and set the table in the next module to explain Jesus and Christianity within a contrasting context of other world religions.

THEOLOGICAL POINTS

Every religion points to a problem and resolution between a deity/god and people. Predominant philosophies equally identify a “problem,” but without the centrality of a deity. This module works in conjunction with our previous modules on salvation where we objectively looked at Islam and the philosophies of Buddhism and Humanism. In this module we will consider the beliefs of Christianity in the same context in which we looked at other views. We will look at Christianity and its unique claims for:

1. Identification of the problem
2. Understanding of the solution and what must be done to satisfy
3. What the outcome the religious system or philosophical system promises

DISCUSSION: BUDDHISM

Every religion points to a problem and resolution between a deity/god and people. Predominant philosophies equally identify a “problem with humanity,” but without the centrality of a deity. Within this module we will consider the views of Islam and the philosophies of Buddhism and Humanism. Clearly there are more faith systems, but these were chosen because they are the primary influencers of spirituality of our age. The framework we will use for this process is to discuss three aspects every faith system has in common. We will identify the problem this faith system addresses, look at the proposed solution, and consider the outcome of faithful obedience.

In this module we will outline the foundational beliefs of Buddhism. Though traditional Buddhism is rare outside of the East, the influence of Buddhism is everywhere. It was the foundational belief system of the New Age movement, and is the primary philosophy behind most movies and cultural spirituality.

***The topic of Buddhism is large, with many books dedicated to explaining it in great detail. This discussion guide is intended only as a summary and a means for an open conversation on the subject.*

MY STORY | Starting Place

Trying to be “a good person” and doing more good things than bad things is core to many people’s human experience. Can you remember when you began thinking about good vs. evil and began striving to be a better person? What were your circumstances and motivations?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

One aspect of the attractiveness to Buddhism is the emphasis on good and bad or, as presented so powerful in the Star Wars trilogy, a battle between light and darkness. As people look at the world around them, it simply makes sense and is a philosophical concept nearly all can observe and agree with. The philosophy of Buddhism was founded in the 5th or 4th century B.C. by a prince in India named Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha). Though he lived his early life secluded and protected by his position, when he entered the world and saw the intensity of human suffering, he was deeply troubled and sought a lifestyle of discipline to break free from the human cycle of suffering.

Identification of the problem

Buddhism is based on established truths. There are Three Universal Truths, which are foundational, and Five Noble Truths, or the insights that give us clarity.

The Three Universal Truths:

1. Everything in life is impermanent and always changing.
2. Because nothing is permanent, a life based on possessing things or persons will never make you happy.
3. There is no eternal, unchanging soul and “self” is just a collection of changing characteristics or attributes.

The Four Noble Truths:

- Human life has a lot of suffering and pain.
- The cause of suffering is greed, self-protection, and control.
- The cycle of suffering can be ended.
- The way to end suffering is to follow the Middle Path; living detached from the values and cycles of the world.

Do these resonate with what you see and experience in the world? Which ones? Why?
Which ones do not resonate with you? Why?

Are there biblical truths that align with these Buddhist principles? Which ones? Which ones do not, and why?

The solution and what must be done to satisfy

The solution laid down by Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) and developed over the years is known as the Eightfold Path. They are disciplines of thought (mindset) and action that devout Buddhists practice to break free from the cycle of suffering.

The Eightfold Path:

1. Right understanding and viewpoint (based on the Four Noble Truths).
2. Right values and attitude (compassion rather than selfishness).
3. Right speech (don't tell lies, avoid harsh, abusive speech, avoid gossip).
4. Right action (help others, live honestly, don't harm living things, take care of the environment).
5. Right work (do something useful, avoid jobs which harm others).
6. Right effort (encourage good, helpful thoughts, discourage unwholesome destructive thoughts).
7. Right mindfulness (be aware of what you feel, think and do).
8. Right meditation (calm mind, practice meditation which leads to nirvana).

As noted above, the trilogy Star Wars presented the philosophy of Buddhism in the battle between light (the Jedi) and darkness (the Sith). The Jedi would have been good practicing Buddhists. Thinking of Obiwan, Luke, and Yoda, how did the Star Wars movies depict the Eightfold Path?

Does the Eightfold Path have a parallel with biblical Christianity? How?
How does the idea of the Eightfold Path differ from Christianity?

What would be the hardest part of living this out?

Karma is a concept found in both Buddhism and Hinduism with slight changes in each system. In Buddhism, Karma simply means cause and effect, or suffering you put into the world will ultimately come back to you. It carries a sense of justice and self-motivation for good action.

How is this a positive idea?

How could it be harmful to people?

Is there a Christian parallel concept to karma?

The outcome and fruit of faithful obedience

Buddhism believes in reincarnation or cyclical life and energy. Life simply returns to the cycle of pain and suffering, though individuals have no experience of this because of the universal truth that there is no eternal, unchanging soul.

The goal of buddhism is to break the cycle and this is called Nirvana. In traditional Buddhism, Nirvana is not a place (like heaven), but rather a state of being. A state where suffering ceases, “is extinguished”, or “blown out” like a flame. The state of Nirvana is known as enlightenment and, according to Buddhist teaching, can be attained in this life or upon death.

What is attractive about this outcome?

What might be troubling?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

Buddhist philosophy is very popular and is foundational to many people’s religious views (even if they don’t know it). Why do you think it’s so attractive to so many?

Do you see how this philosophy may have had an influence on you? How?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

If someone believes that their “balancing out good and bad” will earn their way to heaven, how can you graciously talk about that?