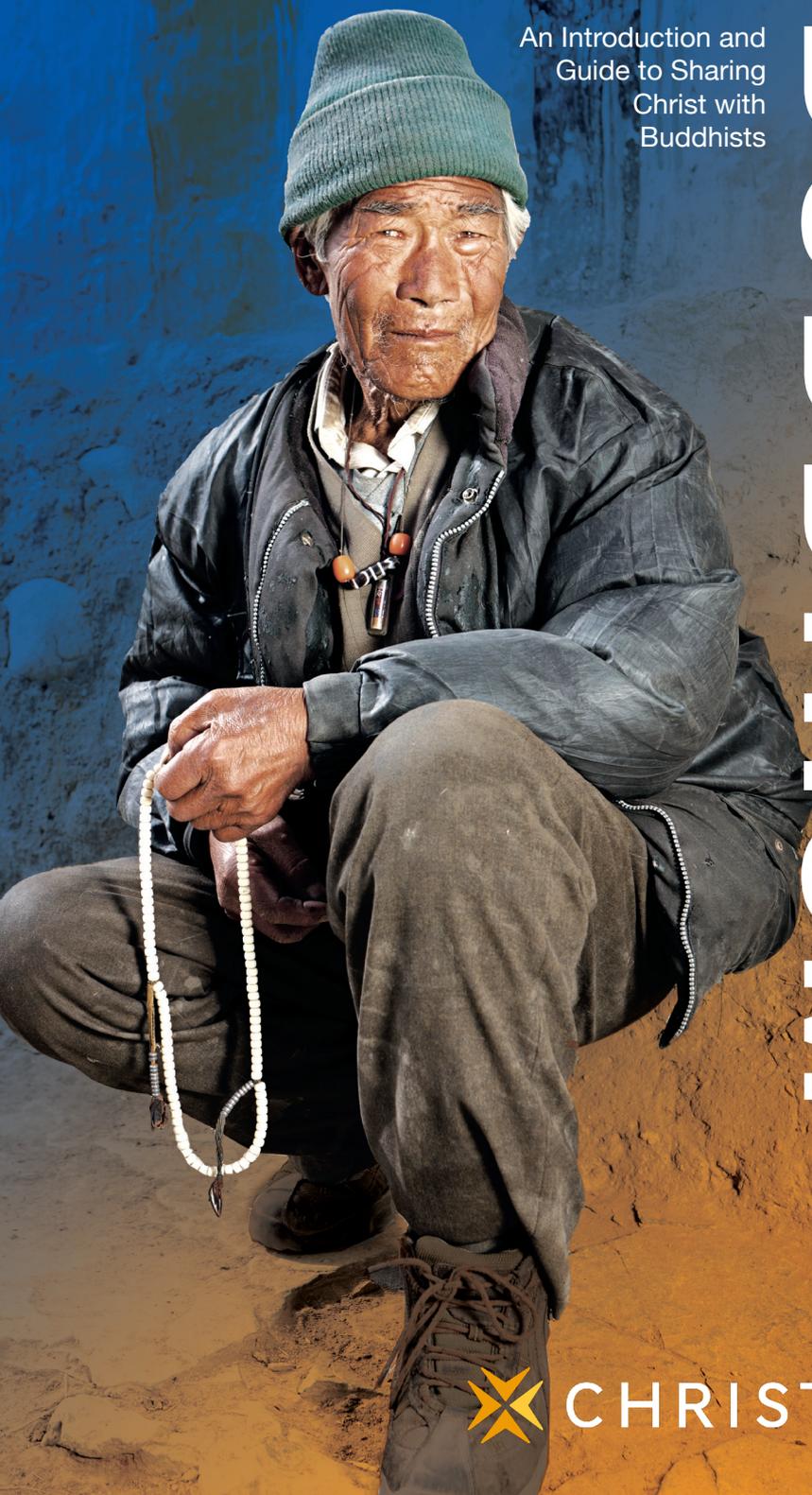


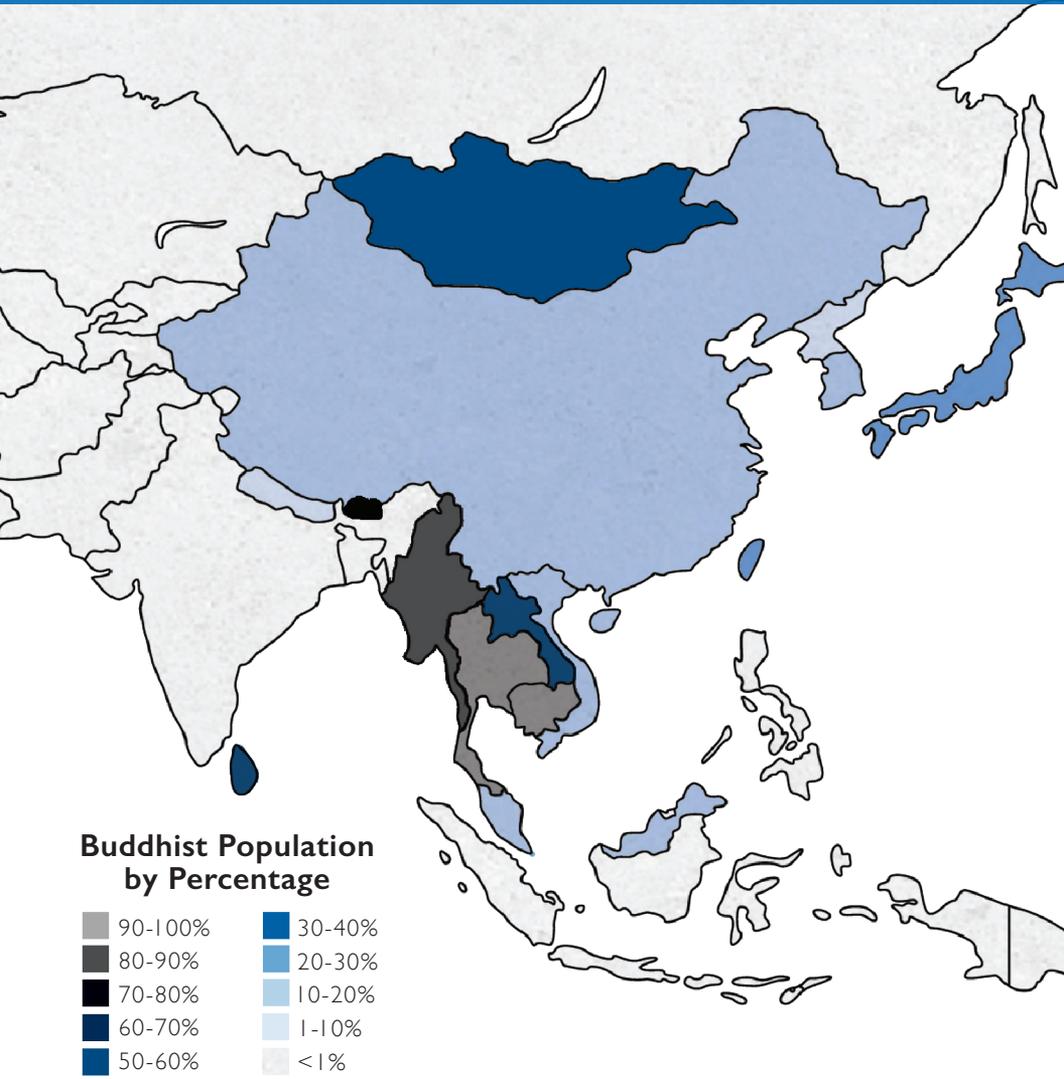
An Introduction and
Guide to Sharing
Christ with
Buddhists

BUDDHISM



CHRISTAR[®]

THE BUDDHIST WORLD



The vast majority of the world's Buddhists live in Asia. However, due to Buddhism's inclusive nature, it's difficult to measure the number of people influenced by Buddhist beliefs.

SEEKING REST FROM SUFFERING



From monks in remote Far Eastern monasteries to businesspeople in the West seeking enlightenment, Buddhism is a religion with many faces. But all followers of this belief system have one thing in common: They're seeking to escape from suffering.

Fewer than one in five Buddhists has the opportunity to hear the gospel in their own language and in a culturally relevant way.

Over 490 million Buddhists worldwide are searching for a remedy that can only be found in the transforming message of Christ's work on their behalf. But few have been introduced to the true source of hope, peace and rest. More than 600 people groups are primarily Buddhist, and over 500 of these groups are considered least-reached: They don't have access to a church that preaches the gospel in their language and worships in a culturally relevant way. The gospel, if they have encountered it, is foreign.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

ORIGINS OF BUDDHISM



A century before Confucius and several centuries before Christ, a young South Asian prince named Siddhartha Gautama ventured outside his royal home. Beyond those sheltering walls, he encountered the heavy reality of human suffering. Deeply disturbed, he left his privileged life, as well as his wife and son, to become a wandering ascetic, seeking enlightenment through self-discipline.

In his quest, Gautama studied the Hindu holy books under two teachers before turning to extreme asceticism. He subjected his body to near starvation, slept on beds of bones, ate filth and held yoga positions for days. But all his efforts ended in frustration. He became convinced the answer must lie somewhere between the extremes of luxury and destitution. After six years of searching, Gautama claimed to have finally achieved enlightenment and became the Buddha (meaning the “enlightened one”). He began to teach and drew followers who joined him in this “Middle Way.” For the next 45 years, the Buddha devoted his life to service and taught others to escape the endless cycle of rebirth and suffering.

The influence of Hinduism is seen in many aspects of Buddhism as Buddhist teachings have adapted many Hindu beliefs. As the years passed, Buddhism absorbed and intermingled with many of the practices and beliefs of the regions to which it traveled. Over time, several distinct schools of this religion formed.

Buddhism Spreads

In the centuries following the Buddha's death, Buddhism gained followers throughout India and then spread to many parts of East, Southeast and Central Asia. In the third century B.C., Ashoka, an Indian warrior prince, converted to Buddhism and sent emissaries who took the religion beyond South Asia. Buddhism reached China in the first century A.D. and gained a foothold after the collapse of the Confucian-influenced Han Dynasty in the third century. By the seventh century, the ruling class in Japan embraced the religion, and Buddhist beliefs trickled down to the common people.

By the seventh century, Buddhism had become a dominant religious and cultural force throughout most of Asia.

Buddhism in the 21st Century

Buddhism is the state religion of two nations and the most common religion in seven nations. The vast majority of the world's Buddhists live in Asia, and the populations of Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar are all over 80 percent Buddhist. However, the majority of modern-day Buddhists mix Buddhism with other belief systems, and it's often hard to know where Buddhism ends and another religion begins.

For example, approximately 18 percent of the people of China claim to be Buddhists, making it home to half of the world's Buddhist population. However, because Buddhism is a religion that easily assimilates with other belief systems, it's impossible to calculate the impact it undoubtedly makes on other Chinese religions or its influence on the worldview of those who identify as atheist or nonreligious—over half of China's population.

Similarly, it's difficult to quantify the Buddhist population in Japan. One Christian worker in Japan explains that many Japanese say, "My family is Buddhist, but I am not a religious person"; yet they practice ancestor worship using Buddhist priests out of respect for their families.



BUDDHIST BELIEFS



While Buddha's teachings, known as the dharma, have been handed down over the centuries, modern-day Buddhism is not based solely on his ideas. As Buddhism spread, it was influenced by a variety of indigenous beliefs, practices and worldviews. The way it is practiced today reflects its inclusiveness and malleability. Thus, the following beliefs are common among Buddhists but by no means universal.

The Great Problem of Suffering

In the Buddhist mindset, the great problem of existence is suffering. Eventually, even pleasures result in suffering as they create sorrow when they are lost. For example, while a mother's love can bring pleasure, when she passes away the loss causes pain.

The problem is not only that people suffer, but that there is no end to suffering. The suffering of one lifetime is hard to bear; but when this suffering extends over countless cycles of rebirth, it's overwhelming. Since suffering is an inextricable part of life, the solution is to escape the cycle of rebirth. This concept, known as nirvana, literally means "extinguish" or "quench." Nirvana is a state of being reached by attaining enlightenment. In it, a person ceases to produce karma and becomes unbound from the cycle of rebirth.

The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha summarized man's predicament in the Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering is universal.
2. Suffering is caused by desire.
3. Suffering is cured by the elimination of desire.
4. The Eightfold Path is the vehicle by which to eliminate desire.

Rebirth and Self

Like Hindus, Jains and Sikhs, Buddhists believe in an endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth known as samsara. Also called the “Wheel of Life,” samsara has no beginning or end and is divided into six realms: heaven, demon, animal, hell, hungry ghost and human. Only those born into the human realm have the capacity to escape this cycle and reach nirvana.

While the Buddhist concept of rebirth bears some resemblance to the Hindu idea of reincarnation, Buddhism teaches that an individual does not have a soul that can come back in another life. Instead, a person is a collection of elements that are temporarily bound together.

The Buddha denied the existence of the soul and taught that every individual is comprised of five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, mental fabrications and consciousness. When people die these aggregates disperse and reform in different groupings, creating new individuals; this transfer of aggregates from the old body to a new body is often referred to as “transmigration.”

Karma

The concept of karma is central to Buddhist beliefs. At its most basic, karma is a form of the law of cause and effect. The idea of karma originated in Hinduism, although the Buddhist interpretation gives this concept a unique spin. To Buddhists, karma is a wave or a force that is produced by the intentions or actions of individuals. Good actions result in good karma, while bad actions result in bad karma. While at first glance this may seem like the biblical concept of sowing and reaping, in Buddhism the concept of karma is an unbreakable law, void of forgiveness.



Escaping the Cycle of Suffering

Since karma binds a person to the cycle of rebirth, the only way to escape the cycle of rebirth (and, in turn, escape suffering) is to stop the production of karma—both good and bad. The human craving for pleasure influences a person to generate karma; thus, at a deeper level, an individual must also deal with the craving for “being” before he or she can escape the cycle and its continual suffering.

Different schools of Buddhism teach varying methods for ceasing to produce karma and achieving nirvana, including meditation, chanting, good works and following the Noble Eightfold Path. This path consists of eight right actions or states of mind that involve wisdom, ethical conduct and concentration.

The Noble Eightfold Path

1. Right Knowledge (or Right Understanding): understanding the Four Noble Truths
2. Right Aspirations: living life for high and noble purposes
3. Right Speech: communicating only that which is kind, frank and truthful
4. Right Conduct: acting in ways that promote peace, purity and honesty
5. Right Livelihood: engaging in occupations that bring no harm to living creatures
6. Right Effort: training oneself in the principles of the Buddha
7. Right Mindfulness: remaining mentally alert and active
8. Right Meditation (or Right Concentration): receiving the effects of the preceding practices and attaining the goal of enlightenment

Each aspect of the Eightfold Path shares a common trait: It's something that's achieved through one's own effort. Even the Buddha had to follow this path. Unlike Christ, who personally provided the solution to mankind's condition, the Buddha could only teach a supposed solution to man's problems which he, too, had to follow.

The Four Powers of Purification

Many Buddhists pursue the Four Powers of Purification as a means to earn merit and attain good karma. These powers include:

1. Power of the Object: Thinking of those one may have hurt and generating compassion for all beings
2. Power of Regret: Recognizing that negative actions done in the past were unwise
3. Power of Promise: Promising not to repeat negative actions and avoiding certain behavior for a specific time
4. Power of Practice: Doing prostrations (bowing), making offerings, reading Buddhists texts and reciting mantras

Merit

Achieving nirvana is said to take an almost incomprehensible amount of time: it's taught that even the Buddha took 92 aeons to succeed. (While definitions for an aeon differ; the term always refers to an extremely long period of time—for example, a trillion years). In addition, the last effort necessary to achieve nirvana will seem harder than all the effort before it and will require long periods of intense meditation. For anyone, this would be very difficult; for the lay person, it would be nearly impossible.

Due to the difficulty of achieving nirvana, Buddhism allows for a system of earning merit in which a person can obtain "credit" by doing something for another person. Merit, which is emphasized in Theravada Buddhism, involves acts such as giving food, money or time to the needy (including monks). Other means of earning merit include moral conduct, meditation, respect and reverence for elders, helping others, rejoicing in another's merit, listening to, sharing and teaching the dharma and correcting others' "wrong views" that aren't in line with the Buddha's teachings. Being a monk is also a means of generating merit, not only for the individual who becomes a monk, but also for the mother who allows her son to become a monk and for the other monks who accept an individual as a monk. Merit can also be transferred from a living person to another person, living or dead.

The value of an effort to earn merit depends not only on the intentions of the person trying to earn it, but also upon the person on the receiving end. It's assumed that the better the recipient, the greater the merit that is generated. For example, giving food to a monk would result in greater merit than giving food to a lay person. This is because the monk will impact more people for good than the lay person, thus magnifying the merit.

The potential of earning merit often motivates Buddhists' actions and speech. Unlike karma, merit is believed to last forever.



FORMS OF BUDDHISM



Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism is the oldest and most conservative form of Buddhism, as it adheres most closely to the teachings of the Buddha. It teaches that enlightenment is available only to a few and is ideally reached by becoming a monk. The word “Theravada” means “the teaching of the elders.” This type of Buddhism is also known as Hinayana Buddhism or the “Lesser Vehicle.” It’s practiced primarily in Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Laos and Cambodia.

Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana Buddhism emerged as a more accessible form of Buddhism. It teaches that all can reach enlightenment with the help of “enlightened beings,” called bodhisattvas. Known as the “Greater Vehicle,” it emphasizes compassion and mercy and is practiced primarily in Northeast Asian countries such as China, Japan and Korea.

One of the most common derivatives of Mahayana Buddhism, particularly in East Asia, is Pure Land Buddhism, often referred to as “Amidism” by English speakers. It focuses on the teachings of the celestial Buddha Amitabha and claims that by calling upon this spiritual leader one can be guaranteed rebirth in the “Pure Land,” a paradise-like spiritual realm.

Vajrayana Buddhism

Vajrayana Buddhism emerged from Mahayana Buddhism and adopted many of the beliefs and practices of an ancient Tibetan religion called Bon. Known as the “Thunderbolt Vehicle,” it offers a means to reach bodhisattva status much faster than Mahayana Buddhism. It’s often called Tibetan Buddhism due to its popularity in the Himalayas, in places such as Tibet, Nepal and Mongolia.

Tibetan Buddhism utilizes occult practices known as tantra, as well as mantras (recitations), mudras (hand positions), mandalas (circular drawings) and visualization of deities and Buddhas, all practices that are said to help an individual achieve enlightenment quickly. It teaches that everyone is a “potential Buddha” and incorporates the teachings of spiritual guides known as lamas.

The Dalai Lama is the central figure in Tibetan Buddhism and governed Tibet until the Chinese government took control of that region in 1959. He and other head figures in Tibetan Buddhism, such as the Panchen Lama and tulkus, are believed to be living Buddhas and previous masters reborn. As of 2018, there have been 14 Dalai Lamas.

Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism, also known as Chan Buddhism, combines Taoism (an ancient Chinese philosophical and religious belief system) with Indian Mahayana Buddhism. It involves trying to understand life’s meaning without the misleading stimuli of language or thought.

Zen Buddhism teaches that all people are Buddha and must look inside themselves in order to release attachments to the world, realize the emptiness of desire and, eventually, become enlightened. This is accomplished by learning to control one’s mind through meditation and other mind-body methods. Zen Buddhism promotes its practices as compatible with other religions, making it appealing to many in the West.

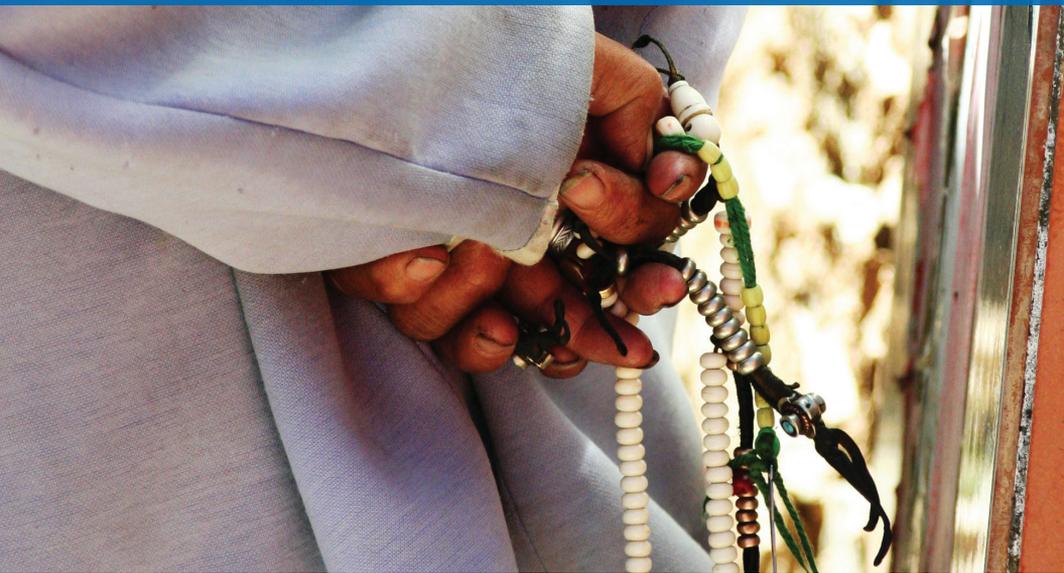
Soka Gakkai

Soka Gakkai is a lay Buddhist movement based on the teachings of Nichiren, a 13th-century Japanese Buddhist priest. The name of this movement means “Value-Creation Society,” and its members strive to create value in any circumstance and increase others’ well-being by manifesting the Buddha’s nature.

Members are taught that through developing their inner resources of courage, wisdom and compassion, they can lead fulfilling, happy lives and overcome obstacles. Soka Gakkai first emerged in the 1930s, and its promotion of peace, culture and education has contributed to its prevalence in Japan and around the world. However, some Buddhists don’t believe Soka Gakkai is “true” Buddhism and may consider it a cult.

Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana are usually considered the three major branches of Buddhism. However, there are numerous other subdivisions, each with its own traditions.

COMMON BUDDHIST PRACTICES



The Three Jewels

Major schools of Buddhism require a person to participate in an initiation ceremony during which they formally take refuge in the Three Jewels (sometimes called the Three Treasures): the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha (the Buddhist community of monks, nuns and laypeople).

Taking refuge in the Buddha involves confidence that a person can become enlightened as the Buddha was. Taking refuge in the dharma means putting the Buddha's teachings into practice by understanding the Four Noble Truths and following the Noble Eightfold Path. Taking refuge in the sangha involves living according to the dharma in community and seeking guidance and support from others on the Noble Eightfold Path.

Buddhist Worship

Buddhist worship takes numerous forms depending on the school of Buddhism to which an individual adheres. At home, many Buddhists set aside a room or part of a room as a shrine with a statue of the Buddha, incense and candles. At temples, they may face an image of the Buddha and chant, take part in prayers and listen to monks chanting from religious texts.

Some use a mantra: a word, syllable, short phrase or prayer that is spoken once or repeatedly, out loud or in one's mind. This practice is thought to have a profound spiritual effect. Sometimes, prayer beads are used to keep track of how many times a mantra has been said. Mantras are sometimes displayed on a prayer wheel or on prayer flags; every time the wheel spins or the flag waves, the prayer is believed to be repeated. Physical prayer aids such as these are particularly common in Tibetan Buddhism.

Meditation

Buddhist meditation involves “stilling the mind,” taking control of one’s thoughts to increase awareness and become more focused and peaceful. It takes several forms and can be practiced solo or in a group. When practiced with a group, meditation can serve to remind individuals that they are part of the Buddhist community and the greater community of all living things. Sometimes, imagery such as a mandala (a symbolic picture of the universe) is used in Buddhist meditation.

Pilgrimage

Buddhists take part in pilgrimages to fulfill a vow, express devotion and create connections with the historical figure that is honored by their destination. The Buddha is said to have identified four pilgrimage destinations, and additional sites sprang up wherever his teachings took hold.

Animism and Ancestor Worship

While textbook Buddhism teaches that there are no gods or spirits, many Buddhists worship gods, spirits and ancestors. This is a form of animism, the belief that both good and bad spirits inhabit inanimate objects, the elements of nature and the universe. These spirits may be manipulated through offerings, rituals and sacrifices.

In addition to animism, many Buddhists take part in ancestor worship. This practice predates Buddhism and was present throughout Asia when Buddhism spread.



Biblical Faith and Buddhism

	BIBLICAL FAITH	BUDDHISM
GOD	Worships one God. God is personal, knowable, holy, just and loving; man can have a relationship with Him.	Teaches there are no gods or spirits. However, some Buddhists worship gods and spirits.
JESUS	Jesus is God's Son, one of the three persons of the Trinity. When He came to earth, He was fully God and fully man.	Jesus was a man. Some Buddhists consider Jesus a bodhisattva: one who can help others achieve nirvana.
MAN	Man has a sin nature and a soul that lives on after death.	Man is impermanent and has no soul; he consists of five aggregates that are disassembled at death.
REBIRTH	New birth (spiritual life) is available by grace through faith in Jesus.	Rebirth occurs over and over; but there is no soul that lives on after death.
SIN	Sin is the violation of God's moral law. It results in a broken relationship with God, guilt and condemnation.	There are destructive actions, but they are not violations of the standards of a supreme God.
FORGIVENESS	Forgiveness is a free gift available through faith in Jesus, who paid for our sin through His death on the cross.	What's done is done, and there is no way to atone for one's actions. Even if a person is forgiven by another person, karma cannot be erased.
SALVATION	Jesus is the Savior. Salvation is deliverance from guilt and sin and the free gift of eternal life. We are saved by grace, through faith in Christ.	There is no savior; the Buddha could only point the way. The ultimate hope is nirvana: escape from the cycle of rebirth.
THE AFTERLIFE	Those who are saved will spend eternity in the presence of God in heaven; those who reject God will spend eternity away from Him in hell.	Heaven and hell are way stations where a person may spend an extended time before rebirth.
SUFFERING	God equips believers to face suffering and uses it in the lives of His people.	Suffering is the great problem of existence and is only escaped by ceasing to exist.

Buddhist Writings

Different branches of Buddhism accept different writings as authoritative and use them in varying ways. Below are some of the most common Buddhist texts.

Tripitaka (Pali Canon)

The Tripitaka, also known as the Pali Canon, is the oldest written collection of Buddhist teachings. However, many commentaries have been added since the teachings of the Buddha were first preserved in written form approximately 450 years after the Buddha's death. The word "Tripitaka" means "three baskets," a reference to the baskets that are said to have stored the original copies, which were recorded on long leaves. Modern-day versions of this extensive collection consist of up to 50 volumes and can be quite costly. It's the only text recognized as canonical by Theravada Buddhists.

Mahayana Sutras

In addition to the Tripitaka, Mahayana Buddhists also view the Sutras, a collection of over 2,000 texts, as sacred. Most of these Sutras were written between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. While different branches of Mahayana Buddhism emphasize different Sutras, some, such as the Lotus Sutra, are important to the majority of these branches.

Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Todrol Chenmo)

The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the stages of dying and rebirth. Written by a Tibetan monk, it's the best-known Tibetan text in the West.



SHARING YOUR FAITH *with a Buddhist Friend*



As Buddhism becomes more prominent in the West, Christians in North America have increased opportunities to develop relationships and share the gospel with followers of this belief system. While the suggestions that follow focus on sharing the gospel with Buddhists from Eastern cultures, they can be helpful in sharing your faith with Buddhists from any background.

Commit to Prayer

Remember that nothing you do or say will be effective without the Holy Spirit working in the life of your Buddhist friend. Ultimately, your efforts will not result in anyone coming to Christ unless God works in your friend's heart. Commit to regularly lift up the Buddhists you know in prayer, asking the Lord to open their hearts and minds.

“Pray that Jesus’ peace will be seen in your life and felt by your Buddhist friends. They will become curious and want to know where your peace comes from.”

– Christar workers serving among Tibetan Buddhists

It's also important to pray with your Buddhist friends. This demonstrates that you worship a personal and loving God and enables them to experience the power of prayer as they realize God hears and answers. In addition, offering to pray for the needs of your friend is a way to demonstrate love toward him or her. Explain that prayer is talking to God personally and ask your friend how you can pray for him or her.

The Role of Relationship

Understanding the Eastern mindset can help you effectively reach out to Buddhists, especially those raised outside of North America. In the West, people are generally viewed as individuals with whom friendships are quickly made and, sometimes, just as quickly forgotten. However, Eastern culture is more relational and rooted in community.

Take time to build trusting, committed, genuine friendships. While you can certainly talk about your faith as you get to know a Buddhist, your words may not hold much weight until you have gained your friend's trust and have demonstrated you trust him or her in return.

Friendship is mutual in Eastern culture. In addition to sharing your Buddhist friends' joys and struggles, allow them to come alongside you in your suffering and rejoicing and see how you deal with difficulties. Don't be afraid to ask your friend for help with something. By "indebting" yourself, you strengthen your relationship; such a bond is helpful in establishing a connection in which you can share the gospel.

Sharing Through Stories and Proverbs

One of the most powerful tools in sharing the gospel with people from Eastern cultures is telling stories and sharing proverbs from the Bible. Try starting with the wisdom books and stories from the Gospels (such as the accounts of Jesus' healings and the Sermon on the Mount) and the book of Acts. Help your friend discover Jesus as the great healer, deliverer and giver of true peace.

In addition, share what Jesus has done for you. Tell how you came to Christ and how He's worked in your heart and given you peace. The concept of a personal relationship with a loving God isn't part of the Buddhist worldview, and it's important that your friend sees an example of this in your life.

Let Your Actions Speak

Virtue is important in Buddhist culture. Your Buddhist friends are watching to see how your faith in Christ affects your behavior. One Christian worker explains: "To them, if your life matches your words, what you say may be true. If your life and your words do not match, it doesn't matter how compelling an argument you make. The words will be rejected." It's vital that your Buddhist friend sees Jesus through your words, actions and relationships with others.

Sharing the Gospel with Understanding

While understanding the teachings of specific types of Buddhism may help you convey the gospel to a Buddhist, it's far from essential. Some Buddhists in the West are unaware of which school of Buddhism they follow; but even if they are very well-versed in Buddhist doctrine, you don't need to be an expert in their beliefs to be used by God in their lives.

Ask questions to discover what being a Buddhist means to your friend, but don't be too concerned about categorizing their religion. Since Buddhism is often mixed with cultural practices, it can be helpful to inquire, "What do you do?" rather than "What do you believe?" Learning about your friend's culture and how their religion impacts their life will help you gain understanding of how to share the gospel effectively, as well as demonstrate that you care.

Communicating in Culturally Relevant Ways

It can be difficult for a Buddhist to understand that Jesus died for our sins because in the Buddhist mindset Jesus' violent death on the cross was a sign of bad karma. In addition, since Buddhism teaches that achieving freedom from suffering requires trillions of years of effort, many Buddhists struggle to accept salvation as a gift. Furthermore, there is no forgiveness for wrongdoing in Buddhism, so it's important to share about the forgiveness, mercy and grace you've received.

Since Buddhism claims there isn't a supreme, holy God, the concept of guilt for sin can also be hard for a Buddhist to grasp. However, Buddhism does teach that certain actions and thoughts make a person "impure." Sharing that Jesus can make us completely pure can help your Buddhist friend comprehend the gift He offers.

Although the East Asian mindset is often more focused on the present than on eternity, the Buddha had eternity in mind as he pondered the cycle of rebirth. It can sometimes be helpful to mention this and use it as a bridge to share what the Bible teaches about eternity.

Like Christianity, Buddhism teaches that there are two possible eternities for every person. However, for Christians, one of these outcomes is not only an escape from suffering but an eternity filled with the joy of living in the presence of God. Share your certainty that you will spend eternity in God's presence, free from suffering and fear.

In addition, when sharing with someone from an Eastern culture, it can be helpful to demonstrate that Christianity isn't a "Western" religion and that the values espoused by the West don't necessarily demonstrate a Christian worldview. If you know a believer with a background similar to that of your Buddhist friend, consider inviting them both to your home and asking your believing friend to share his or her testimony.

As you share, don't be afraid of not knowing the answers to your friend's questions. If you're at a loss in responding, promise to find out; then do so and get back to your friend.

As you share your faith with Buddhists, keep these tips in mind:

- Avoid putting your Buddhist friends in situations in which they feel that not accepting the gospel means not accepting you. Most Eastern cultures highly value harmony, and your friends may feel pressured to tell you what you want to hear to avoid offending you.
- Understand that terms such as "new birth," "rebirth," "born again" and "eternal life" hold different meanings in Buddhism than they do in the Bible and may carry negative connotations. Using them without explaining the biblical meaning may cause confusion. Instead, use terms such as "freedom from shame and impurity" and "life that will have no end, with God and His people."
- Don't present belief in Christ as compatible with Buddhism. Buddhism is inclusive so it's important not to portray Christianity as an add-on religion or one way of many.
- Avoid getting caught up in the details of Buddhist doctrine. Don't let debating specific points distract you from conveying the gospel and how Christ has changed your life.
- Don't focus on "what's wrong" with Buddhism. Doing so takes the emphasis off Christ and is unlikely to persuade your Buddhist friend. Focus on sharing truth.

Obstacles to the Gospel

A Christar Worker Shares

As much as you try to bridge the cultural gap through relationship and understanding, barriers will likely remain. Christar workers spend years learning culture and language in order to communicate the gospel in a way that least-reached Buddhists can understand, yet they still fight the perception that Christianity is a Western religion. For the East Asian, choosing Christ could mean shaming parents and losing family. In cultures in which family is central, this is a devastating loss.

If Buddhist-background believers do not lose their families, they often repeatedly face situations in which they feel that leaving Buddhist practices behind will offend family members or bring shame or embarrassment. For instance, churches and fellowships in Japan are full of believers who are the only Christians in their families; their families expect them to participate in Buddhist and Shinto rituals, which are contrary to faith in Christ.

In addition to cultural barriers, Ephesians 6:12 tells us that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” We cannot begin to understand the spiritual warfare that is taking place over the hearts of our Buddhist friends.

Whether spiritual or cultural, these obstacles are monumental and can only be overcome through prayer. Regularly devote time to lifting up these obstacles before the One who can triumph over them.



CHRISTAR'S MINISTRY



As followers of Christ, we have a treasure in God and His kingdom. The good news is that this treasure is not limited to certain places or people. It is for all peoples—from every language, people group and nation. At Christar, it is our joy to communicate the unsurpassed value of this treasure by serving the needs of others through our lives, professions, skills and words.

Christar is driven by a passion to establish churches among the least-reached: people who don't have access to a church where the gospel is preached in their own language and culture or in proximity to where they live. We trust the Lord to work through us as we send teams to cultivate Christ-honoring transformation in Buddhist communities throughout the world where He is not yet known or worshiped.

Be involved in ministry to Buddhists in your neighborhood, as well as around the world!

This resource was designed to help you better understand Buddhists in your community and equip you to share Christ with them. For churches and individuals who support workers in Buddhist communities around the world, we trust this booklet will encourage you to engage in their work with greater insight and more focused prayer.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

Matthew 13:44

A Heritage of Serving Buddhists

Buddhists have long held a special place in our hearts. The earliest roots of Christar reach back to 1909, when Florence Drew left for China with only a suitcase, a typewriter and a dream. She founded the South China Boat Mission, which established floating boat churches to bring God's truth to coastal fishermen in Hong Kong and the surrounding area where Buddhism was practiced.

Today, our workers use a wide variety of skills and occupations to cultivate Christ-honoring transformation in Buddhist communities. We rejoice in the spiritual fruit that God has been producing through our efforts:

- The Christar Hong Kong Mobilization Center is built on the foundation of decades of church planting. This center is recruiting, training and sending believers to plant churches among least-reached people groups around the world.
- In 1996 a Christar team in Japan began using English classes, special events and a gospel choir to build relationships and meet needs in the community. Over the next 15 years more than 30 Japanese trusted Christ; the church is now functioning independently under the leadership of a Japanese pastor.
- Christar workers in the Far East are cultivating Christ-honoring transformation through relief and development projects as well as discipling local believers with the goal of planting a church in a least-reached community.
- Christar workers are partnering with some of the few believers among Tibetans to reach Buddhists with the gospel and plant churches among them.
- In Brooklyn, New York Christar workers planted a church among Chinese immigrants. Over 25 have been baptized, and the church has begun sending its own workers to plant churches in Asia.



WHAT NOW?



Pray

Regularly lift up the Buddhist world and the workers seeking to reach it with the gospel.



Go

Vast opportunities for ministry among Buddhists exist for businesspeople, community development workers, computer specialists, medical workers, engineers, office personnel and teachers as well as those with drama and music abilities. Nearly any educational degree, ability or skill can be used to bring the hope of Christ to least-reached Buddhists.

We'd love to talk with you about how God could use you for His glory among Buddhists! Give us a call at [1-800-755-7955](tel:1-800-755-7955) or email us at go@christar.org.



Give

Support a worker who is sharing the hope of Christ with Buddhists. For information, go to christar.org/give or email donation@christar.org.

Helpful Resources

Below are selected resources for reaching Buddhists with the gospel of Jesus Christ. For more resources, please visit christar.org.

From a Christian Perspective

Joshua Project (joshuaproject.net): Provides information and sortable statistics on Buddhist people groups.

Biblicaltraining.org (biblicaltraining.org): Offers online “Introduction to Buddhism” and “Essentials of Buddhism” courses taught by Dr. Timothy Tennent.

From a Buddhist Perspective

BuddhaNet (buddhanet.net): Offers a wide range of educational and informational materials on Buddhist beliefs, teachings, history and culture.

Patheos (patheos.com/buddhist): Provides articles on Buddhist history, beliefs, ethics and more, as well as interfaith dialogue.





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Quran references are from The Holy Quran, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2003).

Statistics regarding the world Muslim population taken from the Pew Research Center (pewresearch.org).

Statistics regarding least-reached people taken from Joshua Project (joshuaproject.net).