

What About Buddhism? Titus 3:1-7

Introduction

Frederick Buechner, in his book *Now and Then*, has a section on his comparison of the teachings of Buddha and of Jesus Christ, a topic he wrestled with when he was teaching at Phillips Exeter Academy: “Finally, lest students of comparative religion be tempted to believe that to compare them is to discover that at their hearts all religions are finally one and that it thus makes little difference which one you choose, you have only to place side by side Buddha and Christ themselves.

“Buddha sits enthroned beneath the Bo tree in the lotus position. His lips are faintly parted in the smile of one who has passed beyond every power in earth or heaven to touch him. ‘He who loves fifty has fifty woes, he who loves ten has ten woes, he who loves none has no woes,’ he has said. His eyes are closed.

“Christ, on the other hand, stands in the garden of Gethsemane, angular, beleaguered. His face is lost in shadows so that you can’t even see his lips, and before all the powers in earth or heaven he is powerless. ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,’ he has said. His eyes are also closed.

“The difference seems to me this. The suffering that Buddha’s eyes close out is the suffering of the world that Christ’s eyes close in and hallow. It is an extraordinary difference, and even in a bare classroom in Exeter, New Hampshire, I think it was as apparent to everyone as it was to me that before you’re done, you have to make a crucial and extraordinary choice.”

Transition

Here, we will consider the last of the three largest world religions, outside of Christianity; Buddhism. At its heart, Buddhism is about emptying oneself of concern, attachment, or care for this life. In Buddhism, it is said that in the pouring out of one’s earthly entanglements, in achieving a state of “nothingness” through meditation and other means, a person is able to achieve nirvana, which breaks the cycle of birth and rebirth through reincarnation.

Buddhists regard nirvana as freedom from all worldly concerns such as greed, hate, and ignorance. Nirvana is enlightenment through disentanglement with the world. In what follows, we will consider the central disagreement between Buddhism and the true faith of Jesus Christ; in Buddhism man is to “pour out” all of his concerns, cares, and worries from this life to achieve a state of pure emptiness.

In Christ, God has poured Himself out in the person of Jesus Christ, so that, rather than seeking to empty ourselves of cares, we are enabled to cast our burdens at the Cross; so that rather than achieving a state of “nothingness,” Christ is poured out into us so that, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Philippians 4:13 KJV)

Whereas in following after the Buddha, I am continually pouring myself out, in Christ, my cup runneth over, and out of the abundance of His grace, from me “shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38 KJV) The Chief difference between Buddhism and Christianity is the difference between leaving this world for nothing and leaving this world for Christ and His righteousness!

Exposition

Background. Buddhism was founded by *Siddhartha Gautama* in the 6th century B.C. There was no biography written during his lifetime, so much of what comes to us from history regarding Siddhartha Gautama is intertwined with myth.

Tradition holds that he was born around 563 B.C. He was the son of King *Suddhodana Gautama*, who was a chieftain, or a raja, of the Sakya clan. His father reigned over a small district in the Himalayas between India and Nepal. At birth he received the name *Siddhartha*, meaning “he who has accomplished his objectives”, but was also called *Sakyamuni* (“the wise sage of the Sakya clan”), *Ghagavat* (“blessed with happiness”), *Tathagata* (“the one who has gone thus”), *Jina* (“the victorious”), and, probably most common, the **Buddha** or “*the enlightened one*”.

When Siddhartha was an infant, a sage visited the King's court and prophesied that Siddhartha would become either a great ruler like his father if he remained in the palace or, if he went out into the world, he would become a Buddha. The King believed that if Siddhartha was exposed to any human misery, he would leave his home to seek the truth. Therefore, he ordered his subjects to shield Siddhartha from any form of evil or suffering.

At age sixteen, Siddhartha won the hand of his cousin by performing 12 feats in the art of archery. He may have taken more wives during his life, but his cousin *Yashodara* was his principle wife. Despite his father's attempts to keep him confined to the palace, he ventured outside and observed a leper, a corpse, and an ascetic. From these observations he determined that happiness was an illusion.

As soon as his first son was born, assuring him that the royal bloodline would be continued, Siddhartha left the kingdom on a pilgrimage of inquiry and asceticism as a poor beggar monk seeking truth. For six or seven years, he sought communion with the supreme cosmic spirit, first through the teachings of two *Brahmin* hermits and then in the company of five monks.

However, despite his efforts, he didn't feel he had found truth. At this point he discovered the importance of what he called *the Middle Way*. Instead of denying himself food or sleep as the other monks did, he ate solid food and did not deny himself worldly things. This angered the monks he was with, so Siddhartha moved on. At Gaya in northeast India, he sat at the foot of a fig tree where Mara, the evil one, tried to thwart his becoming the Buddha.

After withstanding the temptations from Mara, he received a revelation. He now felt he knew the way to escape the cruel cycle of rebirth. He claimed to have discovered the four noble truths (*Pativedhanana*), and henceforth was the Buddha.

Four Noble Truths

1. The universality of suffering - People discover through rebirth, aging, and death that life is full of sorrow. We suffer this sorrow until deliverance is achieved.
2. The origin of suffering - Suffering is caused by the false desires of the senses that have been deceived into clinging to the impermanent world. *The quest for immortality further aggravates human suffering.*
3. The overcoming of suffering - If false desires cause suffering, then the desires need to be suppressed, abandoned, or rejected in order to nullify their effects. Ignorance of the way of deliverance and the delusion that there is a permanent self are the primary cause of suffering.
4. The way leading to the suppression of suffering - The noble eightfold path is a sacred path with eight branches called right views of understanding, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct or action, right livelihood, right effort or endeavor, right mind control or concentration, and right mindfulness. These eight branches are not stages that can be lived out in succession or isolation from one another. They are different dimensions of a total way of life.

The Buddha was then faced with a choice. He could retreat into solitude with his knowledge as the other monks did when they felt they had reached spiritual truth, or he could remain with the people and share his knowledge. It is because he chose to stay with the people that Buddhists feel Buddhism is based not only on truth, but on compassion as well. (<http://contenderministries.org/buddhism>)

Buddhism is primarily about emptying oneself to achieve a higher state of conciseness in order to achieve enlightenment. Through enlightenment, one is said to be able to be freed of the cruel cycle of birth, death, and rebirth into worldly suffering. But in Christ, we see another kind of pouring out.

According to an old legend, a man became lost in his travels and wandered into a bed of quicksand. Confucius saw the man's predicament and said, "It is evident that men should stay out of places such as this." Next, Buddha observed the situation and said, "Let that man's plight be a lesson to the rest of the world." Then Muhammad came by and said to the sinking man, "Alas, it is the will of God." Finally, Jesus appeared. "Take my hand, brother," he said, "and I will save you."

Grace has been poured out in Christ, even as Christ poured Himself out into Human flesh, and ultimately poured out His blood at Calvary's Cross. We have no need to pour ourselves out in any manner, be it for a supposedly holy quest for enlightenment, like that of the Buddha, or for any other reason.

Enlightenment does not come as a result of emptying oneself; it comes from turning on the light in the midst of the darkness of our sin and separation from God. Where once darkness reigned in my life, as in yours, where once the void of not knowing God ruled, now the light of Christ shines!

The hope of eternity is not to escape a cruel cycle of birth, death, and rebirth to earthly suffering. The hope of eternity is life with Christ; knowing Christ; being known by God; living in fellowship with the creator of the Universe! Pour myself out to achieve enlightenment? We have already been emptied as we have received the wages of sin; we need not to be further emptied but to be filled with Christ and Christ alone.

For the Buddhist, enlightenment comes by way of letting go of this life, but since that is where it stops, it falls short. You see, enlightenment comes by letting go of this life and clinging to Christ life! "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20 NIV)

Pouring out Illustration: Begin with a pitcher of water, two classes and a large bowl, then demonstrate Buddhism's pouring out by emptying one class into the bowl; emptiness = enlightenment. Then demonstrate the second glass being filled over flowing with water from the pitcher; emptiness being filled with the living water of Christ life! (*Read John 7:38 again*)

Conclusion

In this series, I have quoted or alluded to John 14:6 many times, where Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” Jesus says that He is not “A Way” but “The Way.” To our minds, which have been utterly saturated by relativistic, anything goes; all roads lead to the same place, thinking, this may sound very unreasonable. To make matters worse, he then has the audacity to say that no one can get to heaven except through him. Not only is He the Way, He claims He is the only way. There are a lot of folks who disavow faith in Christ on the grounds that this way of thinking is too narrow minded and small headed.

But is it narrow minded to check a map too see which way will take one to the desired destination, rather than spending so much time wondering the wilderness or the dessert? Is it small minded to seek the answer to a perplexing question?

I submit that it is not small minded at all. Why can Jesus say things like “no one can come to heaven except through me?” It is precisely because he owns heaven. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:16 that through Christ, as the Logos of John chapter 1 – the eternal word of God – God created Heaven. “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” (Colossians 1:16 NIV) The bible also goes on to tell us that God has given Jesus the reign and dominion.

If you stop by to visit a person’s home, who gets to decide whether you are invited in? They do! It’s their place. If you have chosen to disregard and disdain the owner of the home, is it not reasonable to think that that person would not want you to live in their home? Of course it is not!

What is truly narrow minded, arrogant, and outwardly foolish, is to think “I will spend my life in pursuits other than the pursuit of Truth, and at the end of it all, I’ll just assume that there’s an eternal dwelling ready for me.”

Coming to the Truth of Christ is like coming to the truth that when I am thirsty and take a drink, my thirst is quenched. When I hunger and am fed, my hunger is satisfied. Only, when we eat of the bread of life and drink of the cup of Christ, we are eating and drinking of things which are eternal and satisfy without end.

Today, let us turn our hearts ever toward the One True God who has poured out His love in Christ and showered us with His Grace. Amen.