

How One-Mans Teachings Created a New Religion

The term religion has been around and controversial throughout history. Religion by definition is a belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. This has caused chaos and war, yet it provides a sense of hope to many people. There are Monotheistic, Polytheistic, and Non-theistic religions, which are determined by the number of God or gods you believe in. Most religions are considered Monotheistic since they believe in one God. Although Buddhism is considered a nontheistic religion, followers do base their practices and beliefs around the teachings of one person; Gautama Buddha. Buddha's teachings inspired many people to dedicate their lives to him. The objective of Buddhist beliefs and practices is to end one's suffering through achieving enlightenment. The only way to do this was through Gautama's teachings and word.

The man that the teachings are based on was born in Lumbini, Nepal in 563bc. His birth name is Siddhartha Gautama. Since his name, Siddhartha, means "he who achieves his aim", you can say he was meant to grow up to be a figure of importance. From a young age he was going down the path of enlightenment, "Legend has it that at his birth, the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked and the worlds were flooded with light. In all creation, only Mara, the evil one, did not celebrate." (Christine Wicker, BUDDHISM IN AMERICA - Roots of Eastern religion found in Buddha's life story) After looking through many teachings and not achieving satisfaction with them, he left everything behind and set out on a journey. The night Siddhartha left he sat under a Bodhi tree and vowed not to get up until the truths came to him. Several days passed, as he sat seeking truths and clearing his

mind. This time was not easy as an evil demon named Mara was trying to prevent Gautama from becoming the Buddha. His time paid off when he saw the answers he was seeking, it was at this time he became the Buddha. Since finding his truths, he had to try to find followers of his word. At Deer Park he found five men and told them his new understandings, without hesitation they believed and became his first disciples. This marked the beginning of Buddhism. "Guided by the Buddha's teachings, the religion spread throughout Asia and the world, developing three main traditions: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Today, there are many sects among the world's 376 million Buddhists, and practices vary depending on tradition and culture." (Dennis Mahoney, Path of compassion - Buddhism's goal: Through wisdom to end suffering)

Buddhism has grown into a huge religion with over five hundred million followers. However it is separated into three sects Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. These sects all follow Siddhartha Gautama Buddha while maintaining slight variations to their beliefs, "What is common in Buddhism is the emphasis on compassion and how to help other people become happy." (Donna Hamilton of Bexley) Theravada teachings can be referred to as the most orthodox school and entails the admission of human characteristics of Buddha. A major factor of Theravada includes a psychological understanding of human nature, and ensures meditation as a way to transform your consciousness. The other sect Mahayana, known as the Great Vehicle, tends to focus itself on intuition. The other less widely known sect of Vajrayana marks the transition from Mahayana speculative thought to the appliance of Buddha's ideas in real life.

The main goal of Buddhism is to attain Nirvana and in order to achieve this; one must let go of all desires and temptations. The basic teachings of Buddhism are the Three Universal Truths, Four Noble Truths, and Eightfold Path. The Three Universal Truths are nothing is lost in the universe, everything changes, and law of cause and effect, known in the religion as karma. This teaching of Karma is one that is highly regarded in Gautama's teachings,

"It is believed that nothing ever happens to us unless we bring it upon ourselves. We receive exactly what we get be it good or bad.... Every moment of our lives we create new karma by what we say, do and think. If this is understood, there is no need to fear karma. It simply teaches us to create a better and brighter future."

(<http://online.sfsu.edu/rone/Buddhism/footsteps.htm>)

This is a great way to live life because it provides a goal; to do good, so good things come back to you. I think this idea is actually at the center of many religions and it is what gives people hope. I feel like religions have these sets of laws in order to provide their followers with a path to live their individual lives and have them be good people. Another basic teaching of Gautama's enlightenment is the Four Noble Truths. These deal with suffering which was the main focus behind his teachings, "they include: life is suffering; attachment to transient things, such as money and prestige, causes suffering; shedding attachments can end suffering; self-improvement is the path to ending suffering and may go on over several lifetimes." (Dennis Mahoney, Path of compassion - Buddhism's goal: Through wisdom to end suffering) What this is saying is that everyone experiences suffering in his or her

lives yet it can be ended. The only way to end suffering is to attain enlightenment. The last basic teaching of Siddhartha Gautama is the eightfold path that has to deal with ways to achieve enlightenment. The Eightfold Path is at the heart of Buddhism and needs to be obeyed in order to attain Nirvana. To represent this, "He chose the beautiful symbol of the wheel with its eight spokes to represent the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha's teaching goes round and round like a great wheel that never stops, leading to the central point of the wheel, the only point which is fixed, Nirvana." (<http://online.sfsu.edu/rone/Buddhism/footsteps.htm>) Nirvana is the centerpiece and is fixed at the middle because when all of the spokes are there it creates a fixed center symbolizing the enlightenment. Gautama's teachings give people a way to live and if the people follow these they will reach what Siddhartha Gautama set out for.

Siddhartha's teachings were very important and inspirational, and were the reason for the founding of Buddhism. He understood that it would be difficult for people to follow his teachings so he created a thing called the Triple Jewel. The Triple Jewel consists of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, all helping lead to enlightenment. Dharma is cosmic law and order that you are supposed to obey. Sangha is a word for the monastic community within the religion. In Catholicism you follow the Ten Commandments, which are basic rules to live by. Siddhartha Gautama also established some rules in his teachings known as the Five Precepts. Reincarnation is a huge belief in the Buddhist community. Buddhism emphasizes the endless cycle of birth and rebirth, or reincarnation. It is believed that reincarnation is a powerful moral lesson in the beliefs of Buddhists and that each

Buddha and therefore all people are a reincarnation of previous lives. With Buddhists belief in reincarnation, they believe that a person's karma is believed to be the last and most precious end. Until one has attained Nirvana he or she will be reborn again and again until their karma has been reached.

A key component in the way to find enlightenment is meditation. Meditation occupies an important factor in every form of Buddhism.

“A key to Buddha's method is becoming aware of one's own thoughts and emotions through meditation and other practices. In that way, his followers seek to attain freedom from the dictates of ego, which they believe binds human beings to selfish craving and therefore perpetuates the dislocation or suffering of life.” (Christine Wicker, BUDDHISM IN AMERICA - Roots of Eastern religion found in Buddha's life story)

Buddhists believe that to attain personal liberation the individual has to work on it, so they practice this everyday. There is actually two types of meditation Buddhists use to better their spiritual life, vipassana (insight) and samatha (tranquility). In vipassana meditation you try to see things how they really are. It is a way of self-transformation through self-observation. The samatha on the other hand has many techniques for their meditation ways but the most important is breathing. It is sometimes even called mindfulness of breathing. Meditation helps clear the mind and provides relief to your body.

Although Siddhartha Gautama Buddha is not a God or gods, his teachings and beliefs have paved the way for many people to follow in his footsteps. He sought to seek the end of suffering and while doing so he became the founder of Buddhism.

"Dr. Smith calls Buddha "one of the great rationalists of all time, resembling in this respect no one as much as Socrates." He was a man of "cool head and warm heart," writes Dr. Smith". (Christine Wicker, BUDDHISM IN AMERICA - Roots of Eastern religion found in Buddha's life story) Religions all follow a law or set of beliefs and Buddhism is not different. Because of one mans will and perseverance to achieve enlightenment and end suffering, he attracted many people into a religion that we now know as Buddhism. Siddhartha Gautama is a man that has gone down in history and is the person that a whole religion bases their beliefs off of.

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